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Tuesday, 15 May 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Ms. Edjang Mangue
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Minute of silence

The President: At the outset of the meeting, I should like to take a moment to remember those killed yesterday in Gaza, as well as all those — Palestinian, Israeli and others — who have died as a result of a conflict that has endured for far too long. I ask all representatives to rise to observe a minute of silence in memory of them.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video tele-conference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: For the people of Gaza yesterday was a day of tragedy. There are no other words to describe what actually happened. There is no justification for the killing. There is no excuse. It serves no one. It certainly does not serve the cause of peace. My heart weighs heavy today as I begin by expressing my condolences to the families of those killed yesterday and over the past six weeks of demonstrations in Gaza. Who can possibly find words to console the mother of a child who has been killed? I call on all to join me today in condemning in the strongest possible terms the actions that have led to the loss of many lives in Gaza. Israel has a responsibility to calibrate its use of force and not to use lethal force except as a last resort under the imminent threat of death or serious injury. It must protect its borders, but it must do so proportionally and investigate every incident that has led to a loss of human life. Hamas, which has controlled Gaza for more than a decade, must not use the protests as cover in an attempt to place bombs at the fence and create provocations. Its operatives must not hide among the demonstrators and risk the lives of civilians.

Tens of thousands of people in Gaza have been protesting for more six weeks to date — people who live in abject poverty, who survive in prison-like conditions and who live with no prospect for the day after. Those people want their voices heard. They want a future beyond mere survival. Their leaders have failed them. The promises that they have made to them have not been delivered on, and now the people are angry. But their anger, if not channelled in a constructive manner, will lead to more destruction and suffering. Whatever we may think of their motivation, we have an obligation to hear their plight. They have lived through three devastating conflicts. Their lives are marked by personal anguish, scarred by a national tragedy and marred by daily suffering caused by leaders who use them for their own political ends. For 10 years, they have lived under the control of Hamas, while separated from their families in the West Bank and isolated behind crippling Israeli closures. The cycle of violence in Gaza needs to end, and for if it to end it requires every single one of us to put their best efforts into preventing an explosion that could drag the whole region into another deadly confrontation. The international community must step in and prevent war. We need to move forward quickly and effectively with regard to all the projects that we have discussed for many months to solve the energy, water and health crisis of the population. We can do that only in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt, but, before all of that, the senseless violence needs to stop.

Yesterday an estimated 35,000 people participated in demonstrations in Gaza, as did hundreds more in the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nablus and East Jerusalem — as part of the Great March of Return, as well as in protest of the

relocation of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Although no fatalities were reported in the West Bank, where limited clashes took place between demonstrators and Israeli security forces at several checkpoints, the situation in Gaza deteriorated throughout the day, particularly along the perimeter fence. According to various reports, at least 60 people were killed throughout yesterday, including six children, and more than 1,300 people were reportedly injured by live ammunition and rubber bullets. One Israeli soldier was wounded and taken to the hospital for treatment. Since the beginning of the protests on 30 March, more than 100 people have been killed, including 13 children, over half of whom were killed yesterday alone. That constituted the bloodiest day in Gaza, with the highest death and injury toll since the 2014 conflict.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad have acknowledged that members of their organizations were among those killed, and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) claims that at least 24 had links to militant activities. Under the cover of the protests, Hamas and other militants have also engaged in violent and provocative acts, including the placing of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the perimeter fence and other attempts to breach it with the intent of perpetrating attacks. According to the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, at least one IED reportedly detonated against an IDF vehicle during an incursion. Eighteen airs trikes and eight shelling incidents were also carried out by the Israeli security forces on 26 Hamas targets in retaliation for what Israel classified as violent acts.

Against that backdrop, hospitals in Gaza report an unfolding crisis involving essential medical supplies. Drugs and equipment are needed to treat those who have been injured. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, who is currently in Gaza, visited Al-Shifa hospital yesterday, where there is a shortage of beds for the number of wounded arriving from the protests at the fence. He witnessed at first-hand patients being brought in on stretchers and left in the hospital's courtyard, which was being used as a triage area. I appeal to Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian authorities to facilitate the exit of the seriously wounded from Gaza for medical treatment, and I welcome steps reportedly taken by Egypt to that end.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the bravery of the medical staff who continue to put their own lives at risk, such as those working for the Palestine Red Crescent Society, who have endured casualties of their own. I am deeply saddened to note the death of another health worker yesterday during the demonstrations, and reiterate the inviolability of health facilities and medical personnel under international law. Journalists have also been among those injured in yesterday's demonstrations.

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, about which I have reported time and again in this Chamber over the past year, has been compounded by the fact that the Palestinian Authority continues to withhold the payment of salaries to some 20,000 civil service employees in Gaza. To further complicate a dismal picture, on 4 and 11 May, demonstrators destroyed most of the facilities on the Gaza side of the Kerem Shalom crossing — the main point of entry for goods and materials into the Gaza Strip. Members of my team conducted an initial assessment of the site, and I can report that the damage is extensive and will hinder deliveries of fuel and much-needed goods to Gaza for weeks to come. As we speak, the United Nations is working with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to bring in life-saving assistance, despite the destruction and extensive damage to the crossing.

Whoever orchestrated that destruction shares in the responsibility for worsening the suffering of the 2 million people in Gaza. The Secretary-General and I have repeatedly called on all to exercise restraint, for all the necessary steps to be taken to avoid escalation and for all incidents to be fully investigated. I have engaged with all sides to that effect. Public statements and messages by Hamas indicate the intention to use mass protests to infiltrate into Israel and attack Israelis. Such statements and action endanger the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians and cannot be justified. I wish to underline yet again that it is imperative that civilians, particularly children, not be targeted by anyone, used as cover for militant activity or be put at risk or endangered in any way.

As the violence continues, technical problems have also resurfaced in the form of a further decrease in electricity supply, leading to approximately 22 hours of blackouts in Gaza. That is a critical reminder of the fragility of Gaza's infrastructure. Starting tomorrow, the United Nations, together with international partners, will need to focus and redouble efforts to implement projects that will have an immediate impact on improving the electricity, water and health situations as a matter of urgency.

The developments in Gaza are an extremely painful reminder of the devastating consequences of the continued absence of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I would like to reiterate that message, particularly as Palestinians commemorate Nakba Day, or the day of the catastrophe, by which they remember the displacement during the war of 1948-1949, and as they continue to demonstrate in Gaza and the West Bank over the coming days. We must step up our efforts in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We must collectively call on all to refrain from unilateral measures that only steer us away from a peace process, and instead work to end the occupation and advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace, culminating ultimately in two States — Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part — living side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Madam President, for your swift response to our request to hold this emergency meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for the important briefing he delivered today on the tragic events that recently took place in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip.

We condemn in the strongest terms the massacre perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities yesterday, which led to 52 people killed and thousands injured during the peaceful demonstrations that started on 30 March in commemoration of the right of return, joining the fallen martyrs since the Palestinian tragedy began.

Such repeated Israeli violations are simply a continuation of Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, international law and Security Council resolutions, which would not have persisted if the Security Council had taken a firm stance against them and called on Israel to stop such practices. We therefore express our regret that the Security Council was unable to adopt the draft resolution that Kuwait put forth yesterday, calling for an end to Israel's practices and for a transparent and independent investigation to be conducted into the massacres perpetrated against unarmed Palestinians and to hold those responsible to account.

Given the Council's inability to take any measures to establish an investigative mechanism, we will act in the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council in order to guarantee that those perpetrating such acts are held accountable and do not enjoy impunity. We would also like to submit suggestions to prevent the excessive use of force and ongoing violence by the Israeli occupation authorities. We call for measures that would ensure the provision of international protection to the Palestinian people. In that regard, we highlight the provisions of resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994) — to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, end what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories and provide international protection to the unarmed Palestinian people.

The unilateral policies, measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, are a source of concern as it seeks to alter the facts on the ground in the occupied territory, notably the ongoing settlement activities and the expansion of the existing settlements, which is totally illegal and illegitimate and represents a gross violation of international law and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

The same is true of the relocation of certain diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, which is a blatant violation of the relevant Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which considered such unilateral actions null and void, with no legal effect. We emphasize that such steps, which constitute violations of international law, will undermine efforts towards peace, exacerbate tensions, flair the rage and threaten to push the region into more violence, chaos and instability.

The State of Kuwait supports the Palestinian call to give impetus to existing international mechanisms, such as the Quartet, by expanding its membership to include other regional parties, provided that it remains under the aegis of the United Nations peace process. We also support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the sisterly State of Palestine at the national and international levels to consolidate its sovereignty with respect to Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territories.

We underscore that, in order to achieve the long-desired peace, we must start by putting an end to the Israeli occupation, whose fifty-first anniversary is coming up in a few days. That should be based on the

resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by all Arab States at the 2002 Beirut summit. It should also be based on the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to the June 1967 borders. It should address all final-status issues and thereby eventually lead to the Palestinian people realizing all their political legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination, and the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian people appeal to the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to fulfil all of the pledges made towards the maintenance of international peace and security. In that regard, we reaffirm our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people in the defence of their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historical and principled rights to Al-Quds Al-Sharif, guaranteed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy. We call on States to recognize the State of Palestine, with occupied East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Today's meeting was called to discuss the issue of violence in the Middle East. We are all concerned about violence in the Middle East. The United States deplores the loss of human life. But there is a lot of violence throughout the region, and I will note that the double standard is all too common in the Chamber — and working overtime today.

Last week, Iranian forces attacked Israeli positions in the Golan Heights by launching rockets from Syria. That was a reckless provocation and an escalation that must be stopped. It is an example of regional violence that should occupy our attention here in the Security Council. Also last week, Iranian proxy forces in Yemen launched missiles into Saudi Arabia. It was not the first time they have done that. That too is regional violence that should occupy our attention here in the Security Council.

In recent days, Hamas terrorists, backed by Iran, have incited attacks against Israeli security forces and infrastructure. That is violence that should occupy our attention too. The common thread in all of that is the destabilizing conduct of the Iranian regime — a regime that insists on promoting violence throughout the Middle East, while depriving its own people of basic human rights.

The United States welcomes a discussion on that violence in the Middle East. We welcome discussing the ways we can cooperate with each other to put an end to that violence. There is far too little discussion in the Security Council on Iran's destabilizing presence in Syria, its promotion of violence in Yemen, its support for terrorism in Gaza and its dangerous and illegal weapons build-up in Lebanon.

However, in the minds of some, today's meeting was not called to discuss any of those examples of violence in the Middle East. Today's meeting was called to discuss the violence that some suggest was connected with yesterday's opening of the United States Embassy in Jerusalem. For some people, the Embassy opening is said to be a reason to engage in violence. How is that justified? As our President said when he announced the decision in December, the location of our Embassy has no bearing on the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the resolution of contested borders. It has no bearing on Jerusalem's holy sites. It does not prejudge whatever the parties might negotiate in a peace agreement. It does not undermine the prospects for peace in any way. And yet for some this is supposedly a cause for violence.

But let us remember that the Hamas terrorist organization has been inciting violence for years, long before the United States decided to move its Embassy. In recent days multiple news organizations have documented the Hamas incitement in Gaza. They have reported that Hamas maps and social media show the fastest routes to reach Israeli communities in case demonstrators make it through the security fence. They have reported on Hamas messages broadcast over loudspeakers, urging demonstrators to burst through the fence and falsely claiming that Israeli soldiers were fleeing when in fact they were not. The same loudspeakers are used by Hamas to urge crowds to "get closer, get closer to the security fence".

Hamas has attacked the Kerem Shalom crossing, the biggest entry point in Gaza for fuel, food and medical supplies. That is how determined they are to make the lives of the Palestinian people miserable. They light Molotov cocktails attached to kites and attempt to fly them into Israel to cause as much destruction as possible. When asked yesterday why he put a swastika on his burning kite, the terrorist responded, "the Jews go crazy when you mention Hitler". That is what is endangering the people of Gaza. Make no mistake: Hamas is pleased with the results from yesterday.

I ask my colleagues here in the Security Council, who among us would accept this type of activity on their border? No one would. No country in the Chamber would act with more restraint than Israel has. In fact, the records of several countries here today suggest they would be much less restrained. Those who suggest that the Gaza violence has anything to do with the location of the American Embassy are sorely mistaken. Rather, the violence comes from those who reject the existence of the State of Israel in any location. Such a motivation, the destruction of a United Nations Member State, is so illegitimate as to not be worth our time in the Security Council other than the time it takes to denounce it.

Yesterday's opening of the American Embassy in Jerusalem is a cause for celebration for the American people. Moving the United States Embassy to Jerusalem was the right thing to do. It reflects the will of the American people. It reflects our sovereign right to decide the location of our Embassy, a right that everyone in the Chamber claims for their own country. Importantly, moving our Embassy to Jerusalem also reflects the reality that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. It has served as Israel's capital since the founding of the State. It is the ancient capital of the Jewish people. There is no plausible peace agreement under which Jerusalem would no longer remain the capital of Israel. Recognizing this reality makes peace more achievable, not less. The United States is prepared to support peace negotiations and a peace agreement in every way. We want nothing more than peace, a peace in which peoples of all faiths are free to worship in Jerusalem, and a peace in which the rights of all people are respected and the future prospects of all people are bright. That peace will only be achieved if it is rooted in the realities that too many choose to deny. The United States action yesterday promoted the reality and the desire for peace. It is our sincere wish that the nations of the world will join us in this pursuit of credible, realistic and enduring peace.

In conclusion, I want to take a moment to mark the seventieth anniversary of Israel's independence. Here in the Security Council, on behalf of the American people, I congratulate our friends in Israel on the remarkable achievement of 70 years of independence. From humble and desperate beginnings, a proud people have realized the prophet Isaiah's vision of a light unto the nations. May the next 70 years be ones of strength, of hope and of peace.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his sobering briefing. I would like to thank him and his staff for everything they are doing to try to calm down the violence. I also echo his tribute to the medical staff on the ground, as well as his appeal for facilitatiting the evacuation of the wounded.

We have seen a concatenation of loss of life, casualties and volume of light fire in Gaza yesterday, and this has been shocking and appalling to most of us. It is a depressingly familiar pattern that we have seen over recent weeks, and it includes the deaths of the children. At a highly sensitive time in the region, we call for calm and restraint. The further escalation of violence serves no one's interests. It is only destructive to peace efforts and to wider regional security.

We understand that 60 people were killed yesterday in Gaza, six of whom were children. Around 2,771 people were reported injured, and that included over 1,300 injured by live ammunition. The death toll on Monday means that 90 Palestinians have been killed in the past six weeks for approaching the fence that has been placed around Gaza. There is an urgent need to establish the facts around yesterday's events, including why such a volume of live fire continues to be deemed justified. The Palestinian right to peaceful protest is undeniable. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that peaceful protests in Gaza have been exploited by extremist elements. For example, we have seen troops belonging to the Israeli Defence Forces targeted by improvised explosive devices, and we have seen the use of Molotov cocktails. That is not acceptable.

Palestinians have a right to peaceful protest, and Israel has an undeniable right to protect its borders from Hamas and other terrorist groups and threats. The United Kingdom remains strongly supportive of Israel's right to defend itself. We recognize today is a sensitive anniversary for the Palestinians. We implore Israel to act with restraint in accordance with international law and, more than anything, to ensure that its security forces do not resort to the use of excessive force.

The volume of live fire used in Gaza yesterday and the consequent number of deaths is destressing and cannot be ignored by the Council. I want to reiterate the United Kingdom's support for independent and transparent investigations into the events that have taken place in recent weeks, including the extent to which the rules of engagement of the Israeli security forces are in line with international law. The death

toll alone warrants such a comprehensive inquiry. We continue to urge that the findings of the investigations be made public and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

Our position on the status of Jerusalem and the move of the American Embassy is well known. Our position is clear and long-standing. It is that the status of Jerusalem should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and that Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian States. We need to look forward, and we need to work urgently towards a resolution of the long-standing issues between Israel and the Palestinian people. Like the Council, the United Kingdom is committed to a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, and to achieving peace and stability in the wider region. We see negotiations towards a two-State solution as the best way to end the occupation and to meet the national aspirations of the Jewish and the Palestinian peoples. But, now more than ever, we need a political process that delivers a two-State solution. We agree with the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General that the situation in Gaza is desperate and deteriorating and that the international community must step up its efforts. To that end, I would like to conclude by requesting that the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Office bring forward proposals to address the situation in Gaza. They should include easing restrictions on access and movement and international support for urgent infrastructure and economic development projects. We also reiterate our support for the Egyptian-led reconciliation process and the return of the Palestinian Authority to the full administration of the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting, and the delegation of Kuwait for requesting it.

Eight-month-old Laila Anwar Al-Ghandour, 14-year-old Ezz Eldin Alsamaak, 15-year-old Wisaal Fadl Ezzat Alsheikh Khalil, 16-year-old Ahmed Adel Musa Alshaer, 16-year-old Saeed Mohamed Abu Alkheir, 18-year-old Ibrahim Ahmed Alzarqa, 19-year-old Eman Ali Sadiq Alsheikh, 19-year-old Zayid Mohamed Hassan Omar, 20-year-old Motassem Fawzy Abu Louley and 21-year-old Anas Hamdan Salim Qadee were the first 10 people murdered by the security forces of the occupying Power yesterday in Gaza. Today we observed a minute of silence in memory of the victims. However, I also believe that minute of silence served to remind us that the Security Council is ineffective.

The Security Council — not only now or in recent years, but over the past decades — has failed the Palestinian people. Therefore, as a member of the Security Council, and through my brother, the observer of Palestine, who is here with us today, I would like to apologize to the 6 million Palestinian refugees who have lost their homes and now live in camps far from the land on which they were born. I apologize for the promise to establish a Palestinian State that has not been kept for more than 70 years. I apologize for the more than 50 years of occupation and for the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory. The international community has failed them. I apologize for the 10-year inhumane blockade in Gaza and for the construction of a shameful wall along the West Bank. The international community has failed them.

I apologize for the Israeli checkpoints, through which they must pass daily on their way to work. The international community has failed them. I would like to apologize to the more than 97 Palestinians, 12 of whom were children, who lost their lives in the past six weeks since the Great March of Return began. The international community — the Security Council — has failed them. I would like to apologize to the more than 12,000 Palestinians — men, women, the elderly and children — who have been injured as a result of the Israeli aggression. More than 3,500 of them have suffered injuries of varying intensity caused by live ammunition that will leave them permanently maimed. The international community has failed them. I apologize to the more than 300 Palestinian boys and girls detained in Israeli prisons or detention centres. Some are tried in military tribunals, others are simply held in administrative detention. The international community — the Security Council — has failed them.

I would like to apologize to the 169 health workers who were injured while providing emergency assistance to Palestinians along the barrier that separates Israel and Gaza. The international community has also failed them. I apologize for the 18 ambulances that were damaged in recent weeks and for the hospitals and health centres in Gaza that have collapsed because of inadequate supplies of gas, water and electricity. I would like to apologize for the four hours of electricity

provided to them every day. The international community has failed them.

I believe it is necessary to clarify that although there are two parties to this ill-named conflict — because it is not a conflict; we are dealing with an illegal occupation, an occupying Power and an occupied territory — they are not on equal footing. Israel is the occupying Power and Palestine is under occupation. A historic and blatant inequality exists. One party continues to use force to occupy the territory of the other. One party forcibly displaces civilians, confiscates land, demolishes homes and continues to move settlers into illegally built settlements. One party has imposed a blockade on Gaza, which has led to dreadful humanitarian consequences. As Mr. Mladenov so eloquently stated, Gaza has become a sort of prison.

In addition, the unilateral decision taken by the Government of the United States of America to set up its Embassy in the occupied city of Jerusalem only heightens tensions. Bolivia reiterates its firmest condemnation of that decision, as it violates Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The United States, as a supporter of the occupying Power, has become an obstacle to peace. It is part of the problem, not of the solution.

After witnessing recent events, Bolivia believes that the relevant International Criminal Court mechanisms should be employed to conduct an investigation and determine those responsible for the crimes committed during the Great March of Return so that they can be held accountable. Given the current landscape, we firmly commit to taking part in all international efforts to bring about a peaceable solution to the situation. In that regard, we support initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, among others, that would ensure fair and lasting peace and enable the two sides to live in safe, recognized borders. We reiterate our belief that the only long-term solution is the two-State solution, in which at last a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State is established within pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In conclusion, we have heard much talk about Iran, Iran, Iran. We have heard much talk about Hamas, Hamas, Hamas. But we have heard nothing about the real reason for the current situation, which is the occupation, the occupation, the occupation. When the occupation ends, we can discuss whether or not there is compliance with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Bolivia will never justify terrorism. At the same time, we will not fall into the trap of claiming that the problem lies with Hamas when the underlying issue is that a State recognized by the Organization is illegally occupying the territory of another and subjecting a people to sub-human conditions. This is a systematic violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Only when the occupation comes to an end will we be able to say that we have done our duty.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very sobering briefing this morning. As we held an open debate on this issue some two weeks ago (see S/PV.8244), I will focus my remarks today on the immediate situation in Gaza.

We are appalled by the violence that we have witnessed in Gaza since 30 March, in particular the sharp escalation yesterday. Every life lost is a tragedy, but the number of people killed was the highest in a single day since the beginning of the protests. Indeed, it was the bloodiest day since the last conflict in Gaza, in 2014.

Yesterday at least 60 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli security forces and more than 2,000 were wounded. Yet again the Israeli security forces used live ammunition, including when shooting at children. There are reports that several children under the age of 18 were among those killed yesterday, in addition to the seven children killed in the preceding weeks. We condemn the killings, and we express our condolences in connection with the tragic loss of life.

As we have stated repeatedly, Israel has a right to protect itself and the people within its borders. That said, Israel, as the occupying Power, has a responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians and must fully respect the right to peaceful protest; protect civilians; and ensure that the use of force and other measures taken are strictly proportional. The lethal use of force should be exercised with maximum restraint, and only as a last resort. These incidents raise serious concerns as to their compatibility with international law, and there must be an independent and transparent investigation, as called for by the Secretary-General, among many others.

We urge all parties to act with the utmost restraint to avoid any further loss of life and to protect civilians, particularly children. This means never making children the target of violence as well as not putting children

in harm's way or encouraging them to participate in violence. We urge the Israeli security forces to refrain from the use of force against unarmed civilian protesters and representatives of the media. We also call on Hamas and those organizing the demonstrations to avoid any provocations and ensure that protests remain non-violent and peaceful.

In addition, we must not forget that the people of Gaza have lived in intolerable conditions for far too long, in a humanitarian situation that is now deteriorating even further. To tackle this situation and to enable Gaza to recover, movement and access restrictions must be eased. We support the proposal just made by the representative of the United Kingdom on the need to come forward with concrete ideas in this regard.

At this time, Israelis and Palestinians are commemorating defining moments in their history that serve as important reference points for both peoples. The position of Sweden and of the whole European Union on the status of Jerusalem as a final-status issue is clear and will not change. All three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Islam and Christianity — have strong bonds to Jerusalem that must be preserved. A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. In line with the long-standing policy of the European Union, we will continue to respect the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, Security Council resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of diplomatic representation, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

As was stated in December last year, we regret the United States' decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This runs counter to international law and the Council's resolutions.

Our immediate priority must now be to defuse the current tensions on the ground, as more demonstrations are expected today and in the coming days. The lethal violence cannot be allowed to continue. All parties must take immediate steps to de-escalate, and the Council has a responsibility to actively promote such efforts. We regret that the press statement proposed by Kuwait yesterday could not be adopted, and we hope that a way forward on an appropriate public expression can be found without further delay. There is unanimity around this table, I believe, in calls for restraint and de-escalation to break the cycle of violence, relieving the dire situation in Gaza, and for resumed serious negotiations towards peace.

Increased regional instability must not contribute to a marginalization of the Israeli-Palestinian question. We must more than ever urgently engage to bring the parties back to negotiations so as to advance the two-State solution. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the Palestinian Authority's re-establishment in Gaza are also needed. A halt to settlements and an end to the ongoing Israeli occupation are fundamental. It is time for a relaunch of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this emergency meeting, and Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive and concerning briefing.

Peru is appalled at the situation in Gaza, where at least 60 Palestinians died only yesterday, in addition to the dozens of people killed and thousands of others wounded in recent days and weeks. We note with particular sorrow that many of the victims were minors. These unacceptable actions run counter to minimum standards of coexistence, international law, international humanitarian law and human rights, and they increase instability in the Middle East.

Peru believes that the acts of violence that took place yesterday and in recent weeks, because of their scope and repercussions in terms of human lives, should be the subject of an exhaustive, transparent and independent investigation that will make it possible to assign responsibility. It will be necessary to specifically determine the degree of compliance by the Israeli authorities and troops with the principles of proportionality, precaution and legality, given that they maintain that they are acting in legitimate self-defence. It will also have to be determined if the Palestinians committed acts of violence and incitement beyond the exercise of their rights and the freedoms of association and expression, putting the lives of children and young people at risk.

We agree with Secretary-General António Guterres on the need for Israel to calibrate the use of force and minimize the use of live ammunition. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort, under the imminent threat of death or severe injury. Likewise, also in line with what was stated by the Secretary-General, we believe that Hamas and the leaders of the Gaza demonstrations should keep the demonstrators away from the Israeli

fence and refrain from all violent actions, provocations and attempts to breach the fence. We stress once again that in the context of any assessment of the violence in Gaza, due attention must be paid to its root causes, particularly the tragic humanitarian situation of its population. Failing that, the consistent scarcity of goods and basic services, as well as the shutting in of millions of Palestinians, will continue to create an ideal scenario for those who promote violence and extremism.

Peru believes that the deplorable events that bring us together are yet further proof of the deep and progressive deterioration of the political and humanitarian conditions underlying the Palestinian question as well as the lack of prospects for a definitive solution. We note with concern that in this fragile environment, unilateral decisions and actions taken with respect to the city of Jerusalem could lead to an even greater escalation of violence. We should recall that the final status of Jerusalem must be negotiated directly between the parties.

We call once again on political, religious and social authorities and leaders, on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, to act with moderation and promote the resumption of a high-level dialogue that will enable their respective peoples and the Middle East as a whole to move towards a sustainable peace. We reiterate our call on the parties to resume direct negotiations, with a view to reaching a definitive solution to the conflict on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, with two States living in peace, side by side, within mutually and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, it is urgent that the Council act with unity on this issue, not only with respect to the resolutions adopted and the responsibility for international peace and security assigned to it by the Charter, but also because of the moral obligation to defend life above all else.

Ms. Edjang Mangue (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, my delegation would like to thank Kuwait for calling this emergency meeting on the Middle East, specifically due to the gravity of recent events on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip. We also thank you, Madam President, for the swift convocation of the Council. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his succinct, clear, exhaustive and very alarming presentation.

We all witnessed yesterday's bloody events in the Gaza Strip, shared by media the world over. Estimates put the number of lives lost at more than 50, including those of children, and the number of injured Palestinians at more than 2,500, 1,300 of them shot by Israeli Defence Forces troops. Taken together with the death and damage wrought since the Great March of Return began, in late March, jeopardizes hopes for peace, security and stability in Gaza. My delegation regrets this situation and these deaths, and we urge the international community to remedy the situation.

As we said in the previous emergency meeting (see S/PV.8219), on 30 March, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the parties to refrain from any act that could lead to violence. Acts of violence must cease immediately and definitively, and both parties must comply with international law as set out in the various resolutions of the United Nations.

These incidents not only increase existing tensions on the Palestinian question, but also exacerbate the long-standing socioeconomic and humanitarian instability beseting the population of Gaza. This is clear from the request for emergency medical aid from neighbouring Egypt and the possible transfer of the wounded.

Equatorial Guinea views the historic claims of the Palestinians to be just, in accordance with the numerous statements of the African Union on the matter. We also believe that Israel has the right to live in peace and security. Israel must recognize that, just as its right to exist cannot be denied, neither can that of Palestine. Only in this way can two independent States coexist with Jerusalem as their shared capital. Both of the parties must therefore comply with international law as expressed in the various relevant resolutions.

In addressing the Palestinian question, we cannot ignore the important role of countries with political influence in the Middle East, which can, and should, play a prominent mediating role between the belligerents, promoting, among other things, the implementation of resolutions emanating from the Organization in which we have all invested our trust with regard to preventing and resolving the world's conflicts.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his detailed and informative briefing and his dispassionate approach to a particularly troubling situation, the developments about which he has consistently alerted us.

Yesterday and today mark the culmination of a month and a half of violence and repression by the Israeli forces against Palestinian protesters in Gaza. The repeated warnings to the Council, including by France, since late March have gone unheeded. The situation on the ground continued its relentless escalation, yesterday reaching the shocking total of more than 60 demonstrators killed in a single day, which brings the number of Palestinian demonstrators killed by the Israeli forces over the past month and a half to nearly 100. These tragic numbers speak for themselves.

First, the ongoing situation in Gaza is a tragic new illustration of the human consequences of the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a result of a total absence of political hope. We have been saying this for years: the prevailing situation in Gaza is not sustainable. The ongoing violence is itself rooted in a decade of Israeli blockades, aggravated by the stalemate in the process of reconciliation and its humanitarian consequences. The Hamas-backed protests of recent weeks are fuelled by this situation, together with the absence of any prospects for hope in the peace process with Israel or on inter-Palestinian reconciliation; the absence of any prospects for economic improvement, due to the land, air and sea blockade maintaining one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, at around 40 per cent, and per capita income lower than 25 years ago; and a very youthful population, more than half of them aged under 18, for whom, in this context, hope for peace has given way to the feeling of having nothing to lose.

The unfolding tragedy cannot be separated from the desperation of the people of Gaza. That is why, beyond de-escalation — which is an immediate imperative — and beyond meeting emergency humanitarian needs, it is essential to work towards sustainable solutions for Gaza in the broader context of the two-State solution. This is why we urge Mr. Mladenov to engage in-depth in that regard in the Gaza Strip.

Secondly, the record of repression of the weekly demonstrations, which have been taking place since 30 March, is shocking. A new line was crossed yesterday, which risks heralding a point of no return and triggering a cycle of uncontrollable violence. Since 30 March, 99 Palestinians, including 12 minors, have been killed while demonstrating along the separation line in Gaza. This very heavy toll is directly related to the inadequate and disproportionate response of the Israeli security forces. Yesterday President Macron clearly condemned the violence of the Israeli armed forces. These serious incidents must be fully explained, and we recall in that regard the request of the Secretary-General for an independent and transparent inquiry.

In the immediate term, two fundamental requirements must be met to put an end to this cycle that threatens to continue this very day with demonstrations related to the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of Palestinian exile in 1948: on the one hand, respect for international humanitarian law, which is fully applicable in the Gaza Strip, in particular the imperative to protect civilians; and, on the other hand, respect for human rights, in particular the right to peaceful demonstration. Any steps Israel takes to safeguard its security, which is a legitimate concern that we share, must be taken within this context. We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to demonstrate careful judgement, the utmost restraint and to avoid the disproportionate use of force. Israel is a State governed by the rule of law and must, as such, apply rules of engagement that respect international standards of law and order, in accordance with its international commitments.

We condemn indiscriminate fire against protesters, which has been systematic in recent weeks, in particular yesterday. Nothing can justify that. Lethal weapons must not be used against unarmed demonstrators who pose no serious or imminent threat. This is the message of numerous non-governmental organizations, including Israeli and Palestinian ones. They underscore the extreme seriousness of the gunshot wounds inflicted on demonstrators without any justification in terms of security and that the Gaza health system is overwhelmed and approaching breaking point.

At the same time, we call on the protesters to refrain from any acts of provocation or violence, and we warn those, principally Hamas, who would seek to hijack the demonstrations or use them to threaten Israel's security along the barrier. As members know, France will never undermine the security of Israel.

Not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank and Jerusalem, the risk of the situation deteriorating and escalating out of control is extremely high in an increasingly tense regional context, especially on the northern border of Israel. Everyone must therefore show restraint and a spirit of responsibility, in particular the Palestinian and Israeli officials in their respective statements.

It is also up to the Security Council to speak with a strong voice in order to help to prevent the ongoing escalation. That is a key point. The silence observed by the Council since the beginning of the crisis is less and less understandable. Since yesterday, it has left a dangerous void. That silence must be replaced by a clear public statement without delay. To that end, France is ready to work in a constructive spirit with its partners. The Security Council cannot be prevented from speaking on such a serious matter. Otherwise, its very calling, if not its raison d'être, are at stake.

I come to my last point. In the tense context that I have just described, our collective responsibility is to preserve the parameters that alone will in due course resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The question of Jerusalem is at the heart of such parameters because it is a precondition for peace between Israelis and Palestinians and, beyond that, regional stability. The question of Jerusalem concerns the entire international community.

Jerusalem has been the subject of several Security Council resolutions. In that context, the status of Jerusalem should be considered by the parties in their discussions with a view to a peace agreement. In line with the consensus that has prevailed for 70 years in the international community, France does not recognize any sovereignty over Jerusalem without agreement. Following the June 1967 conflict, we therefore did not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem, which is part of the occupied territories under international law.

Similarly, in 1980, we did not recognize Israel's unilateral acts with regard to Jerusalem. The Security Council adopted resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), which provide for two principles in particular. First, any decision or action to alter the status or character of Jerusalem is considered null and void and must be rescinded. Secondly, all States Members of the United Nations that have established diplomatic missions in Jerusalem must withdraw them from the city. That is what happened as a result of resolution 478 (1980) without exception.

Jerusalem should become the capital of two States — Israel and Palestine — in line with modalities that must be defined through negotiation. No unilateral decision can replace that. France condemned the decision that was taken by the United States in December and implemented yesterday.

As we all know, there is no solution other than the two-State solution. However, there will be no two-State solution without agreement between the parties on Jerusalem, and no possible agreement on Jerusalem outside the internationally recognized parameters. Abandoning that framework will fuel tensions and violence because of the symbolic, historical and religious importance of Jerusalem to both the Palestinians and the Israelis. It would also create a space that will be rapidly filled by all kinds of extremists in the region who have an interest in the political conflict becoming a religious conflict.

France cannot allow itself to again see Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories, starting with the Gaza Strip, descend into chaos. Yesterday President Macron met the King of Jordan, the Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, as well as President Abbas. Today he will speak to the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

In the symbolic and historical context of these commemorative days, which are essential to both the Palestinians and the Israelis, we call on everyone to exercise restraint, ensure calm and prevent any escalation. We call for a resumption of dialogue and negotiations, in which the international community should shoulder its full responsibility in order to support the parties and to ensure results.

Because it is a friend of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, France intends to continue its efforts with unwavering resolve. We call on the Council to fully play its role in that regard.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China supports Kuwait's request for today's emergency open meeting on the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Security Council.

Recently, there have been protests and demonstrations in Gaza. In that regard, Israel used force, which has caused heavy casualties among Palestinian civilians, including many women and children. We express our serious concern over that development. We condemn any violent actions against civilians and call on both Israel and Palestine, in particular the Israeli side, to exercise restraint in order to prevent further escalation of the tense situation. We convey our condolences and sincere sympathy to the victims and their families. We call for an objective and impartial investigation in order to clarify the events.

China has consistently advocated that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be settled through peaceful negotiations. China condemns any measure that exacerbates tension and causes casualties among innocent civilians. We urge the parties concerned to stop the violence, the abusive use of force and, in particular, actions against civilians. The use of violence and force will not bring about security for anyone. We urge the parties concerned to create enabling conditions, resume contact and dialogue as soon as possible and seek to return to the right track of the political negotiations.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is serious. That does not help regional stability. We hope that the parties concerned will earnestly implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, fully lift the blockade on Gaza as soon as possible and provide the people in Gaza with a normal and dignified space for their survival and development. We call on the international community to step up its assistance and support to the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine is at the heart of the Middle East issue. It is fundamental to peace in the region. In that regard, the status of Jerusalem is a highly complex and sensitive issue. It represents the basis for the settlement of the Palestinian issue. Several General Assembly and Security Council resolutions include provisions pertaining to that issue. Under the current circumstances, we call on all parties to bear in mind peace and calm in the region, to exercise restraint, to avoid any words and deeds that may escalate the situation and to work together to facilitate the de-escalation of the situation. All parties should respect the historical differences, uphold fairness and justice, implement international consensus and strive for peaceful coexistence. In accordance with such principles and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the final status of Jerusalem should be settled through negotiations so as to reach a solution that accommodates the interests of all parties.

The two-State solution is the right way to resolve the question of Palestine. It is also an important guide for action. The international community should uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative and resolve differences through negotiations in order to achieve a comprehensive, lasting and just solutuion to the Palestinian question as soon as possible.

China remains committed to supporting and facilitating the Middle East peace process. We have always stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their just cause to restore their legitimate national rights and supported the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will continue to tirelessly strive to achieve peace in accordance with the four-point proposal put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping and to promote the political settlement of the question of Palestine.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation is grateful to the Kuwaiti Permanent Mission for initiating this emergency briefing on the unfolding situation in Gaza. We also express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive and objective update.

We were alarmed by the situation in that part of the Middle East. We are extremely concerned about the increase in the death toll caused by violence on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. My delegation expresses deep grief following the tragic loss of Palestinian civilians during protests. We consider that to be an irredeemable loss of life. Kazakhstan fully supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-expression and peaceful demonstrations. While tensions on the ground are high, Kazakhstan calls on all actors to show responsibility to prevent further tension and to avoid the instigation of violence. We believe it could be a dangerous development in the situation in the Middle East region as a whole. In that regard, Kazakhstan calls on both sides of the conflict to exercise restraint.

The Republic of Kazakhstan calls on the international community to take exhaustive measures to immediately end the violence. After several weeks of violence and in the face of the growing number of Palestinian victims in the Gaza Strip still today, Kazakhstan condemns the indiscriminate use of live ammunition against civilians and urges the Israeli authorities to exercise restraint. Investigations should be conducted on all of those cases. We reiterate that Israeli security forces must calibrate the use of force. We recall the common duty of United Nations States Members to protect civilians, especially minors.

We join the position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We endorse the outcomes of the Dhaka declaration

adopted at the forty-fifth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Bangladesh on 6 May. Specifically, we reiterate that Jerusalem is the common homeland of different ethnicities and religions. All parties must avoid taking actions that might further escalate the situation, while both Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to existence. International law is unambiguous about the status of Jerusalem. Any unilateral action to change the status of the city runs counter to the letter and spirit of international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and fuel violence and instability in the region. The status of Jerusalem will have to be determined in the framework of negotiations to come in the context of internationally agreed parameters in order to reach a just and lasting solution — namely two States, living side by side in peace and security.

Kazakhstan considers it important to continue efforts to consolidate the Palestinian ranks on the Palestine Liberation Organization political platform as a necessary condition to practically realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for the creation of their own independent State.

We note that the parties must find a solution for the difficult humanitarian situation of Gaza. That requires economic confidence-building measures and strong support from the international community. With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Kazakhstan reiterates the need to support that important mechanism. In that regard, Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed earlier by the Special Coordinator over the funding of UNRWA this year. A significant reduction in its regular budget has already increased the anxiety level of the 5.3 million Palestine refugees, who have already suffered the longest-protracted refugee crisis.

Lastly, while reaffirming its commitment to the decisions and resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Republic of Kazakhstan has consistently supported the early, complete and comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East within the framework of peaceful political progress. We believe it is urgent to recreate the necessary conditions for the search for a political solution in a regional context already marked by strong tensions. We call upon the leaders of Israel and Palestine and other parties to take concrete steps to preserve the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the two-State solution, to strengthen the prospects for peace by remaining calm and exercising the maximum restraint in order to avoid actions that can erode and derail peaceful efforts and further escalate tensions between the Palestinians and Israelis. It should be based, as we always say at the Council, on the inalienable rights of Palestinians to statehood and Israel's to security. In the very near future, we must begin negotiations on each existing problem, aimed at reaching agreement on pending issues and giving them a final status. We believe that only a political solution and confidence-building measures in different dimensions can help the parties to resolve the contradictions.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We have been following the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and the high number of Palestinians killed and injured in the Gaza protests. Let me join others in expressing our deepest sorrow and sympathy for the loss of lives. We wish the injured a speedy recovery.

I would like to echo what the Secretary-General said yesterday through his spokesperson:

"Israel security forces must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire. Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations have a responsibility to prevent all violent actions and provocations."

We are also holding this meeting against the backdrop of ongoing discontent from Palestinians and the region over the latest development surrounding the issue of the city of Jerusalem. We have expressed our position on this issue unequivocally, which is in line with the African Union position reiterated yesterday by Chairperson Moussa Faki. We believe the Jerusalem issue is a final-status issue that must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

It is self-evident that, unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying problems are resolved peacefully, the current tragedy would only happen again and again, eventually reaching the point of no return. That is where we seem to be headed. The situation is that grave. Much greater violence is becoming increasingly imminent, as a natural consequence of the current circumstances.

That is why preserving the possibility of reaching a two-State solution is absolutely critical and cannot be avoided. There is no other viable option. All arguments to the contrary are unrealistic and are not consistent with the firm commitment to seek a just and democratic resolution of the problem.

That is why it is so critical that ways and means be found to limit the damage that would be caused and to try, no matter how difficult, to continue the peace process and save the two-State formula, which is a long-held position of the United Nations and the international community. But there is no denying the fact that the formula may soon become unviable — a situation from which no one would benefit, jeopardizing the aims of achieving greater security or promoting national aspirations. The basic elements required for reliable and sustainable peace between the Palestinians and Israel are two, that is, dependable security for Israel, on the one hand, and the realization of the national aspiration of Palestinians, on the other. Any attempt to run away from this reality or to ignore it can lead only to the tension, violence and bloodletting we have been witnessing. Whether done openly and without qualms or in a less transparent manner and far from public gaze, the attempt to make the Palestinian quest for justice and fairness a footnote to other issues that the region has in abundance would no doubt lead to perpetual turmoil with unimaginable consequences for all.

The writing is on the wall, and the trajectory is by no means unfathomable. Nevertheless, it is the parties that should show flexibility to engage in direct and meaningful negotiation to reach a final settlement on all issues. However, the international community — and particularly the Security Council — should discharge its responsibility in helping and encouraging the two sides to do so.

It is also in that context that we support initiatives that have been under way to facilitate negotiation between the Israelis and the Palestinians with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution. The efforts of the Middle East Quartet, the Quarter's road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the work of countries within and outside the Council are very much appreciated and should be encouraged to continue.

I want to conclude by expressing profound appreciation to Mr. Mladenov for the very honourable way he has been discharging his responsibilities. We realize how heavy that responsibility is.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Kuwait for the initiative of holding this emergency meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I congratulate Mr. Mladenov for the quality of his briefing.

Côte d'Ivoire remains particularly concerned about the serious events on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip in the context of the March of Return. The violence, which began on 30 March, culminated yesterday, 14 May, with the transfer of the American Embassy to Jerusalem. In the face of this new outbreak of violence, which has reportedly caused the deaths of nearly a 100 Palestinians and injured nearly 8,000 since 30 March, my country calls on the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that could exacerbate the situation and defer the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis to a for a long time to come.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that there is no alternative to the search for peace other than through dialogue. It therefore urges the parties to return to the negotiating table and engage in constructive dialogue on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. In that regard, my country reaffirms its principled position in favour of a negotiated settlement leading to the solution of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

As for the final status of the city of Jerusalem, Côte d'Ivoire believes that it must be negotiated within the framework of a concerted solution between the two parties, as stipulated in the relevant United Nations resolutions. My country therefore calls for the resumption, without delay, of talks between Israelis and Palestinians with a view to ending the political impasse in the peace process.

My delegation unreservedly supports the objective of comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and reiterates its readiness to work with all Council members towards a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his sobering briefing. We deplore the loss of lives and the number of people wounded, as he described.

As I said last month in the Security Council, we cannot afford to put the peace process on the back

burner (see S/PV.8244). The gap between the two sides is growing fast, as is illustrated by yesterday's events. Those events serve to underline that the current trajectory leads to loss of lives, confrontation and despair, and it results in growing divisions between Israelis and Palestinians.

I will focus on the three points: first, the demonstration in Gaza; secondly, the issue of Jerusalem; and, thirdly, the importance of the peace process and the role of the Security Council.

As to my first point, on the demonstrations in Gaza, we are alarmed by the new levels of violence. As Mr. Mladenov said, 59 people have been killed and more than 2,600 people have been wounded, 770 of whom were injured by live ammunition. That is the highest number of people killed in Gaza in one day since the conflict of 2014.

The numbers suggest that almost one in 40 people was hit by live ammunition and that one in 16 was wounded in that manner. That raises serious questions about the proportionality of the Israeli response. We are particularly worried by the killing of children and other minors and the high number of health-care workers hurt. That underlines again the need for restraint as well as the need for an independent, transparent and prompt investigation into all incidents that led to casualties.

We take note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to review IDF actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border since 30 March.

While recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, we repeat our call upon that State to ensure that its responses are necessary and proportionate at all times, in line with its obligations under international law. The use of live ammunition should be a measure of last resort only, as stated in the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

We strongly urge all Palestinian parties to ensure the peaceful character of protests and not resort to violence. Calls to storm Israel or for the use of violence are unacceptable. Peaceful demonstrations should not be used as a cover for violence.

The demolition of the Palestinian side of the Kerem Abu Salem crossing only harms Palestinian interests. We call upon the de facto authorities in Gaza to ensure the safety of that crossing, which is the only crossing for the entry and exit of food and medical supplies and other goods. It should be protected. We call upon the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza to repair the damage as soon as possible. We welcome Israel's decision to resume and ensure the normal functioning of the crossing today, despite the challenging environment.

These developments show that a structural solution for Gaza is needed now more than ever. At the same time, the humanitarian crisis has to be addressed. We would like to ask Mr. Mladenov to present his ideas and proposals on what can be done in that regard.

My second point concerns Jerusalem. The future status of Jerusalem is perhaps the most sensitive and complex of all final-status issues. Jerusalem is a holy city for Jews, Muslims and Christians. The ties of the Jewish people to Jerusalem are irrefutable and must not be denied. The ties of the Palestinian people to Jerusalem are irrefutable and must not be denied. This calls for wisdom; this calls for prudence.

Unilateral steps with regard to the future status of Jerusalem are not only unwise and counterproductive, they are above all in contradiction to international law. But they cannot be used as an excuse for violence. We will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem, as embodied in resolution 478 (1980), among other things, including on the location of diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved through negotiations.

My third point concerns the peace process and what the Council can and should do. First, looking at the whole picture, what we need in the current situation is de-escalation. That applies to Jerusalem and Gaza and to Israeli-Palestinian relations generally. All parties should focus on defusing tensions and enabling efforts towards a better future for the region. While wisdom and courage are needed to return to negotiations for a political solution, both sides are taking steps that are incompatible with resolution 2334 (2016). Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's speech on 30 April contained unacceptable remarks about the origins of the Holocaust and Israel's legitimacy. Such rhetoric will only play into the hands of those who do not want a two-State solution. Israeli political leaders who advocate for annexing parts of the West Bank only play into the hands of those who do not want a two-State solution. We call on both sides to take steps that create

mutual trust and help to preserve the possibility of such a solution.

The current tensions should not be used as an argument against action. On the contrary, they demonstrate the urgency of more resolute action now. Realistically, only a two-State solution will enable both sides to fulfil their aspirations, put an end to the conflict and achieve the just and lasting peace that Israelis and Palestinians long for and deserve. We call on the members of the Quartet to convene to address the negative spiral. The situation in Gaza is worsening with each passing week and we therefore believe that a united reaction from the Council is urgently needed to help de-escalate the situation.

In conclusion, we are willing to engage with the other members of the Council to formulate an appropriate public expression that addresses the recent events and all the unhelpful steps taken on both sides. We are convinced that this can be done in a balanced manner, which will enable the Council to contribute to de-escalating the current situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin by expressing my condolences to the families of the Palestinians who were killed in the Gaza Strip and wishing a speedy recovery to the wounded. We mourn together with the Palestinian people.

We are grateful to Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his substantive briefing.

Moscow is deeply concerned about the escalation of tension in the occupied Palestinian territories, which reached a dangerous level against the background of the ceremony marking the beginning of the transfer of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv, which coincided with Palestinians' commemoration of their day of catastrophe or Nakba. The number of victims is seriously worrying and we share the feelings expressed by our Security Council colleagues about it.

Security Council resolutions state unambiguously that all issues related to a definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian situation can be resolved only through a direct dialogue between the leadership of Israel and Palestine. We believe that this also applies to Jerusalem, a city that should remain open to all representatives of the three monotheistic religions. Unilateral actions revising agreements affirmed decisions of the international community have become alarmingly frequent. It is obvious to us that they cannot contribute to achieving a just and lasting peace or, where a settlement in the Middle East is concerned, to realizing the national aspirations of the Palestinians and ensuring Israel's security. Unfortunately, those who undertake such actions are not only demonstrating that they are unwilling to see reason and stop, they are actively trying to provoke yet more States, increasing the risk of involving them in the destructive conflict in the Middle East.

We reaffirm the right to peaceful protest and firmly condemn the indiscriminate use of force against civilians. We urge the parties to refrain from steps that could make the situation worse. The current events have once again shown that in the continuing political vacuum of the past four years or so, the calls for violent solutions and the revision of previously reached agreements are reverberating with an ever-more destructive resonance. They are exacting a real price, expressed in human lives, tears, ruined lives and dashed hopes. However, that does not stop the irresponsible politicians. The result is a vicious cycle of violence that begets violence.

In these explosive circumstances, we see the urgency of mobilizing the efforts of the international community to relaunch the political process between Palestinians and Israelis on the international legal basis that we are all familiar with, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, which should enable the establishment of a two-State formula and the creation of an independent and a sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. For our part, we will continue to consistently work to promote an Israeli-Palestinian settlement based on a two-State format approved by the international community. Russia has proposed its services as a mediator several times and has offered to host a summit between the leaders of Palestine and Israel in order to start a direct dialogue. The offer still stands.

As recent events have shown, a vacuum in constructive international efforts is extremely dangerous. In particular, we think it is the right time to reactivate the engagement of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which, whatever anyone may say, remains a unique universal mediation format supported by Security Council resolutions. We welcome and support the inclusion in a Middle East

settlement of constructively minded regional players, especially Egypt.

We underscore the importance of the work being done by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the occupied Palestinian territories and refugee camps. The support provided to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to be indispensable.

To sum up, we would like to note the following. Despite some international actors' ambitious plans and grandiose projects, neither the world generally nor the Middle East in particular has become any safer in recent years. There have been many unilateral actions that have flown in the face of international law and have only worsened the trends towards destabilization. The current situation in the Palestinian territories is a clear example of the fact that the situation is going in the wrong direction. In the past few days, unfortunately, our feeling that those who are taking these steps have no intention of changing their direction has strengthened.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive but unfortunately profoundly alarming briefing.

We express our great concern about the tragic loss of human life in the Gaza Strip. During protests near the Gaza fence, a large number of people have been killed and injured, unfortunately including children. As we might face more tension in the coming days, we call on everyone to show the utmost restraint to avoid any further escalation of violence leading to the loss of life. We condemn all acts of terrorism, as well as incitement to violence, and we expect all to ensure that civilians, particularly children, are not put in any danger. We call for an independent and transparent investigation into those incidents and furthermore call for respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of civilians.

Although we recognize Israel's right to protect its borders, we strongly underline that the use of force must be proportionate. In that context, let me stress that Israel must exercise maximum restraint in the use of live fire. With regard to demonstrations, we emphasize that Israel must respect the right to peaceful protests, while Hamas and those who are leading the demonstrations in Gaza must ensure that they remain peaceful, strictly non-violent and without any provocations.

We call upon all parties to strictly comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Given the number of casualties among civilians in the recent escalation in the Gaza Strip, it is our imperative to protect them at all levels. Therefore, we encourage all efforts to enhance the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law by the parties to the conflict.

The current situation in Gaza could have significant consequences for regional and international peace and security. The last three conflicts in Gaza over the past decade were a clear example of that. Therefore, the Security Council should contribute to de-escalation efforts, including through appropriate public expression.

While talking more broadly about the latest developments, we would like once again to reiterate our firm commitment to the two-State solution and, in that context, underline our position on Jerusalem, which remains unchanged. We strongly believe that the aspirations of both parties concerning Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States must be found through negotiations. The status of Jerusalem should also assume mutual recognition of historical relations and national rights of both parties to the city. We will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including the location of diplomatic representations until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

Let me once again underline that reaching a peace agreement will be possible only through peace talks based on international law and the principles governing peaceful relations among States. A key element in that context would also be a meaningful dialogue among the three main monotheistic religions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I thank Poland, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for holding this emergency meeting. We also express our gratitude for the sympathy and

condolences expressed by all members of the Security Council during the minute of silence honouring our martyrs. We thank Council members for having felt the urgent need to discuss the grave, deteriorating situation in occupied Palestinian territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip, owing to the heinous and deliberate crimes committed by Israel against unarmed Palestinian civilians. In addition, we thank the fraternal State of Kuwait for its current efforts as the only Arab member of the Security Council. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

We are meeting today at a tragic and painful moment for the Palestinian people, with great sorrow and bitterness. We convey our sincerest condolences to the families of the martyrs. May they rest in peace. We also wish a speedy recovery to all those who have been wounded as a result of the brutal Israeli attack on the Palestinian people who expressed their resistance in the besieged Gaza Strip on the first evening of the sacred month of Ramadan. We condemn in the strongest terms the odious massacre committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip. We call for an immediate halt to the military aggression against our people and for a transparent, independent and internationally led investigation.

The occupation is the main source of violence in our region. Attempts by some to deny that fact are undermined by the reality on the ground. We ask of those who maintain diverging narratives why they have often blocked any transparent, independent and internationally led investigation. We have said in the Council that we would accept the outcome of such an investigation beforehand. The Secretary-General, as well as Mr. Mladenov and 14 members of the Security Council, have agreed to such an investigation on many occasions. I reiterate that we will accept the outcome, whatever it may be, of such an investigation. The question is whether the other parties are willing to accept such an investigation themselves.

Why do some block the will of the majority of the Council? If what is happening on the ground is not clear, an internationally led investigation should be carried out for us to find out. As we said, we will preliminarily accept its outcome. Are the other parties predisposed to an independent, impartial and transparent investigation to be conducted under the auspices of the Secretary-General, so that matters do not continue in an environment of accusations and mutual suspicion? Let us conduct such an investigation.

Israel has chosen to intensify its brutal attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. Israel has decided to target them in cold blood, in flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant resolutions on the protection of civilians. That amounts to a war crime and a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.

We have come to the Security Council many times to ask for immediate action to stop Israeli aggression against our unarmed people, who are crushed under the odious Israeli occupation and have been suffering from forced displacement for more than seventy years.

We have sent hundreds of letters describing the current brutal Israeli occupation of our people's territory. We have sent numerous appeals asking for implementation of the provisions of international law, international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We have sounded the alarm about the crushing occupation of an entire people and the various forms of abuse and oppression to which they are subjected. We have warned the Council not to turn a blind eye to the disaster in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the continuing deterioration in the conditions there thanks to the racist Israeli practices, which have increased and escalated with the illegitimate and provocative decision of the United States regarding Jerusalem. We have warned the Council about the ongoing impunity that Israel enjoys. We have asked for the exceptional immunity that enables Israel to act as if it were above the law to be removed. We have urged that Israel be held responsible for its actions and for justice for its innocent victims.

In the past, and specifically over the past two months, we have not ceased to beg the Council to prevent another massacre at the hands of Israel, the occupying Power. We knew that the occupied Palestinian people — our young people, men, women and elderly — would bear the burden of such a massacre, carried out deliberately and indiscriminately. What was the response to all of those calls? Can it be that the Council did not hear them or take all those warnings seriously? Can it be that just one member of the Council can prevent it from responding to its most elementary responsibility by blocking three attempts to release press statements? Those statements asked for just one thing, a transparent and impartial investigation to determine the facts on

the ground. Why is there such disregard for the lives of innocent Palestinians? How many Palestinians have to die before the Council takes action?

If a massacre happened in a Council member's country, and in the space of 24 hours 61 people, including eight children, died and more than 3,000 were injured, what would they do? Would they accept paralysis in the Security Council? Would they accept seeing it do nothing in the face of crimes committed by a cowardly occupying Power that hides in hills a kilometre from Gaza targeting it with air strikes, rockets and committing other heinous acts? The occupiers are armed and target unarmed people in Gaza. Would the members of the Council accept that on their own territory? Would they accept the Security Council remaining silent in the face of a massacre that continued for more than 24 hours?

The world has early-warning mechanisms, means to mediate and resolve conflicts, even accountability mechanisms. Despite all of that, none of it was applied in the case of Palestine. Council members can see what is happening right now on the ground. Why did all of those Palestinians have to die? Why are they not enjoying life this morning with their families? Did they deserve to die? Did those children deserve to die? Did they deserve to be taken away from their parents? The international community has passed laws and encouraged the protection of the rights of every human being. Why are Palestinians the exception? Why should we be the exception? Why do those massacres happen while the Security Council does nothing? Why are we the exception? Why is the Council paralysed? Throughout the past six weeks, while we have been targeted, the Council has been paralysed. Why are we the exception? When is the Council going to act? How long is it going to followthis double standard, especially when it comes to those who want to teach us a lesson? Why do they have a double standard when they want to control the Council? It is so terrible that we have to keep asking it again and again.

Israel has historically tried to deprive us of our humanity and our natural right to life, and to justify its crimes by using its own security as a pretext, as if the occupying Power has a right to enjoy security while it denies the same right to the people being crushed by its occupation. They have the right to security but we do not. Once again, we are the exception. They have the right to fire live ammunition at us in order to kill more than 61 unarmed people and injure more than 3,000 in 24 hours, wielding heavy weaponry. They are in trenches a kilometre away from the peaceful demonstrations and they have more weaponry than they need.

Today, yet again and with a heavy heart, our beloved Gaza Strip is burying more children and young people who had simply been peacefully demonstrating to protest the miserable living conditions unfairly imposed on them by the Israeli occupation, to reject the humiliation, oppression and servitude they are subjected to and to call for their rights, including the right to self-determination and the right of return. Israel, the occupying Power, killed 61 civilians in just 24 hours, including eight children. Israel injured more than 2,771 people, many of them severely, in that same 24 hours.

That brings the number of victims since the beginning of the Great March of Return on 30 March to 110 martyrs, including no fewer than 12,000 civilians injured, with at least 250 of them children. Many of those victims' injuries are severe because of the Israeli occupying Power's barbarous use of live ammunition. Israel deliberately uses lethal ammunition on Palestinian civilians, or the kind that delivers the greatest possible physical injury, leaving victims permanently disabled. According to reports from international organizations, many of the victims have suffered severe bone and tissue injuries. I call on the Council to invite those organizations — such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem — here to listen to them. They can tell the Council about the kind of weapons that were used, inflicting lasting, lifelong physical disabilities. Their limbs are amputated. They are crippled. Those are barbarous acts that show the Israeli army's lack of humanity where civilians are concerned. That is the real definition of terrorism. A similar situation in any other country would have caused an uproar. We will not be the exception. We are the Palestinian people.

Israel targets our children in order to inflict the cruellest of punishments on us and thereby extinguish the fire of life within us, because Israel understands that our children are invaluable. We live for our children. They represent our best future, the future that we wish for.

Civilians have the right to peacefully assemble and demonstrate. That is an enshrined right for everyone. The insinuations that Palestinians are responsible

for their own deaths because they are protesting the illegitimate occupation are provocative and racist. In other countries the participation of young people, women and families in demonstrations is proudly held up as proof of a vibrant democracy, and it is protected under the right to freedom of speech and peaceful demonstration. Half a million people demonstrated in Washington, D.C., against the use of guns in schools. Families and schools participated. That is permitted in other countries, but when Palestinians do the same thing in Gaza and occupied Palestinian territory, they are accused of using children as human shields. We reject that racist narrative, which turns us into people excluded from humanity.

We have the right to demonstrate with all of our family members against the occupation and its arrogance. We have the right to exercise our rights. Our men, our older people, our women and our children have that right. It is natural, civilized and accepted in ever country that is a member of the Council. Why is it not accepted in ours? Why are we being accused in a racist, fallacious way for simply exercising the same rights as anyone else, in spite of living under occupation and in a much more difficult situation?

Like the rest of humankind, we wish to teach our children about love of country and about collective participation in civilized human actions. Why are such accusations being directed at us? Those activities are not scorned in other countries. They do not say that civilians are being used as human shields. We categorically reject such descriptions of peaceful Palestinian demonstrations. We also reject the use of such claims to exonerate Israel, the occupying Power, of its responsibility in using live ammunition against Palestinian civilians, and of its responsibility for deliberately causing their deaths, mutilations and injuries. Those actions add to the despair of the Palestinian people and lessen their hopes for justice and peace.

Our call for international protection of the Palestinian people goes hand in hand with international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, which call for the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict, including the protection of children, women and humanitarian workers, especially journalists. We call for the implementation of those standards and principles in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the besieged and occupied Gaza Strip. No matter what version of events Israeli puts forward, the Gaza Strip cannot be excluded from the implementation of international standards for the protection of civilians. Ensuring international protection is now urgent, especially since Israel, the occupying Power, has violated international law. It has clearly failed to shoulder its responsibilities under international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, to ensure the security and prosperity of Palestinian civilians under occupation. That responsibility therefore now falls to the international community, in accordance with the Geneva Convention and with the resolutions and commitments of the Security Council itself.

The document sent by the Secretary-General a year and a half ago, during the Spanish presidency of the Council, on the various experiences and forms of international protection for civilians, should not remain simply words on paper. The Council should consider it in depth and should determine how to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people now that the occupying Power has failed to shoulder the responsibility that it bears under international law. That is why it is now the Council's responsibility to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people until the end of the intolerable occupation of our country and until Palestinian independence has been achieved.

I should also mention the illegitimate and provocative decision by the United States Administration concerning Jerusalem, which flies in the face of international consensus and violates the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). That Administration has chosen to support Israel, which has increased and exacerbated tensions and sensitivities and led to this trail of blood. While no one is questioning the sovereign right of a State to choose the location of its Embassy, if that right runs counter to international law and Security Council resolutions, it is no longer a sovereign right. No country has the right to imperil our territory and place an Embassy in a territory under occupation. Jerusalem's status has been well known to the entire Council since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which determined Jerusalem's special status, and of all the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), as well as the agreements concluded between us and the occupying Power. According to those documents, the status of Jerusalem is to be determined in final status negotiations.

No one, under the pretext of sovereignty or for any other reason, has the right to act in flagrant violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. If we were talking about transferring the Embassy from Tel Aviv to Haifa or Ashdod, that would be fine, and the United States would be free do so. But transferring the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is not up to the United States. That is an issue of international law and the international community.

The Trump Administration refuses to listen to what the world is saying. It refuses to listen to what is stated in United Nations resolutions, in particular those of the Security Council, or to what is laid down in international law and international standards. It refuses to listen. The United States is a super-Power that should be defending international law first and foremost. It is a super-Power that should be defending the resolutions of the Security Council and of the United Nations before anyone else, because of its position as a permanent member of the Council. As a super-Power, it should be the first to abide by international law, not flout it or close its eyes to the situation on the ground. The whole world can see the provocation. The United States should review its position and its flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Furthermore, the United States Administration did not just ignore the specificity and sensitivity around the status of the city and its central role in peace; it also decided to transfer the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem while the Palestinian people were commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba, their day of catastrophe. It is another provocative decision by the United States Administration that completely ignores the feelings and legitimate rights of Palestinians and the political concerns and religious sentiments of Christians and Muslims all over the world. It is a provocation for millions of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians. The United States took that decision in complete disregard of everyone, including the Palestinian people.

As a super-Power, the United States should have put pressure on Israel to end its violations against the Palestinian people, compel it to respect international law and create an environment conducive to breaking the political deadlock and achieving peace, security, prosperity and dignity for everyone. Regrettably, it decided to do the opposite. It decided to bolster Israel's intransigence and impunity and protect it from international condemnation, accountability and any measure that might rectify a situation that is unfair to Palestinians and to their right to freedom and independence. The most recent decision taken with regard to Jerusalem has inspired the right-wing Israeli Government to implement its illegitimate policies and practices, including the murder of innocent civilians in broad daylight, without fear of consequences, since Israel has always enjoyed impunity. That has fuelled its aspirations to gain forcible control over Palestinian territory, including through the illegitimate and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem.

We must acknowledge that the absence of accountability and the protection of Israel from sanctions has enabled Israel to go ever further in its settlement building and racist policies towards the Palestinian people. It has a green light permitting it to commit increasingly serious crimes against innocent people, kill larger numbers of people, imprison Palestinians, confiscate greater stretches of land, destroy more houses and displace more people. That has provoked the current developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That impunity has enabled Israel to continue its illegitimate and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip for more than 10 years. The blockade has witnessed three devastating wars, during which Israel has targeted infrastructure on the Gaza Strip, exacerbating the situation for approximately 2 million Palestinians. Israel has decided to impose collective punishment, which constitutes a war crime. Israel deprives Palestinians of protection. Urgent action is therefore required to rectify this very difficult humanitarian situation.

We have repeatedly called on the Council to lift the illegitimate Israeli blockade of Gaza and provide the humanitarian assistance we need to ease our people's suffering. Regrettably, that request has not been granted so far. We are making that request again today. Here we would like to recall resolution 1860 (2009) and the Council's demands on this issue. We ask that serious measures be taken to exert pressure on the occupying Power to end the blockade and open crossing points to enable the free movement of people and goods, in line with international humanitarian law. We also call for the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, in spite of the financial crisis imposed on it, continues to implement its mandate and provide assistance to refugees. It also continues to play an important role in

easing the suffering of the people of the Gaza Strip and meeting their most urgent needs.

We call on the Security Council to act without delay to find an immediate solution to this sensitive issue, which threatens international peace and security. The Council must take immediate action to stop the massacre of our people, especially in Gaza. It cannot remain silent. It must demand that its resolutions be respected and it should guarantee their implementation. We call on all countries to work collectively or individually on the issue, in line with their legal commitments and in support of international law. That should include condemning the illegitimate and brutal attitude of Israel to the Palestinian people under occupation. Israeli settlements in our territories, including in East Jerusalem, should not be recognized. Any attempts by countries to support that illegal situation should be denounced. Measures should be taken to ensure accountability and justice. We must also take urgent action to save the lives of innocent civilians and prevent the situation from deteriorating in order to have a chance, however small, to achieve a just peace. That is why international protection must be provided to the Palestinian people in line with international humanitarian law.

Seventy years after the tragedy, injustice and shock of the Nakba, the Palestinian people, along with the international community and the members of the Security Council, continue to believe that international law is the way to justice, given that it is the surest path towards peace. States should translate words into action. It is time for serious and immediate action to be taken to ensure the primacy of international law, resume efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation and achieve a just and lasting peace so that the Palestinian people can live in dignity and peace and exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom in an independent Palestinian State and the right of return. Our people have waited a long time. We have suffered for a long time. We can wait no longer for an end to this grave injustice. I request that the Council not dash our hopes and aspirations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I will begin today by sharing the facts. For the past month, Israel has faced violent riots at the security fence with the Gaza Strip. They were not demonstrations or protests. They were violent riots. Rioters have thrown Molotov cocktails, planted explosive devices and rolled burning tires. They have sent flaming materials over the fence, igniting widespread fires on Israel's southern agricultural lands. They have repeatedly attempted to forcibly breach the fence and infiltrate Israeli territory, with the explicit goal of killing Israelis.

Hamas, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, has taken the people of Gaza hostage. This past Friday, a Hamas-led mob set fire to the Kerem Shalom border-crossing terminal and destroyed large parts of it. That crossing is a major entry point for outside goods to enter Gaza. The damage set gas lines and electricity infrastructure on fire and will cost millions of dollars to repair. But Hamas does not care. It values destruction over prosperity and death over peace. Israel has known that for a long time. We were reminded of it just last week, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) found and destroyed the ninth Hamas terror tunnel since last October. The tunnel started in Gaza, running alongside the Erez pedestrian crossing and ending just metres from a village inside Israel. Its goal was terror — killing and kidnapping Jews in the surrounding Israeli towns.

Hamas lives on death, but not just the death of Israeli civilians. As we have reported time and again, Hamas is guilty of exploiting the innocent people of Gaza as human shields. Hamas terrorists hide behind innocent young children and place them directly in the line of fire. The facts and the footage do not lie. Hamas is committing grave violations of international law. Its terrorists continue to hide behind innocent children to ensure its own survival, while its leaders incite the people of Gaza to violence. Yahya al-Sinwar, the head of Hamas in Gaza, recently said to a group of Palestinian youth:

> "We favor assassination over natural death and are always willing to sacrifice our lives".

A few days ago, a Hamas member who was captured after attempting to cross into Israel provided critical insight into Hamas's plot. I will reveal some of what we have learned.

First, Hamas is instructing its activists to cut the fence and steal Israel's security cameras in order to sabotage and topple the fence and disrupt IDF activity. Secondly, Hamas wants the riots that it is instigating to be seen in the international media as a popular uprising, not as a violent action led by its militants. And thirdly,

and most importantly, Hamas terrorists are hiding behind civilians during the riots. However, if the fence is breached, heavily armed Hamas terrorists will enter Israeli territory under cover of the mob to carry out attacks on Israeli civilians. Those are the facts.

When it comes to the mob rushing to the fence, too many in the international community never miss an opportunity to legitimize the Palestinian voice of violence. But when it comes to the safety of the Israeli public, too often the world is silent. This is one of the leadership's most cherished tactics. Their cycle of death works as follows: they incite people to violence; they place as many civilians as possible, including women and children, in the line of fire so as to maximize civilian casualties; they blame Israel; and then they come here to complain to the United Nations. That is the deadly game the Palestinians play, and they play it at the expense of innocent children.

Once again, the Palestinian leadership is using every ounce of its energy to attack us and to attempt to destroy us. One of the players in this game was sitting right across the room: the Palestinian representative, who left the Chamber, like Abbas, who came here, spoke and left; it is a routine. Mr. Mansour and his friends are guilty of placing young Palestinian children in harm's way. They are killing their own people; they are guilty of exploiting them for their disgraceful public-relations game.

We predicted this situation many months ago, because the Palestinians always employ the same strategy of manipulation. Every time the Palestinians have an opportunity to change the course of history — to partner with us on the path of peace — they always choose violence. They never fail to miss that golden opportunity to build a better future for their children and for ours.

But the Palestinian leaders are not the only participants in this scheme. Some in the international community are playing into their hands. They are falling into the trap, giving the Palestinians the attention they seek and legitimizing Palestinian lies and violence. Israel has witnessed this pattern over and over again, since our earliest days. Even in 1947, we watched the Palestinians miss their first opportunity. The United Nations had proposed the creation of both a Jewish State and an Arab State in the land of Israel. The Jews were given just a portion of our historical homeland, yet we accepted it. But the Arabs said no. The Palestinians could not bear the thought of sharing what had been our land to begin with, so they launched a war against us.

Israel ultimately won that battle, but the Palestinians continued with their lies and relentless violence, and too many in the international community let them get away with it. They falsely equated Zionism with racism. They saluted the Palestinian cause as Israelis were murdered, kidnapped and forgotten. They sided with Palestinian killers, often with no questions asked.

Fast-forward to 2005; you forgot about this. Israel disengaged from Gaza. We left completely. No Jewish communities — you call them settlements — or occupation. We took the entire Jewish community out of Gaza. We even took out the people who had been buried in Gaza. No IDF, no checkpoints, no civilians, nothing; we left. Prime Minister Sharon decided to try. We left Gaza in 2005. Gaza could have become a Palestinian success story, maybe the Singapore of the Middle East. It had the potential, but it could not reach it because Hamas took over in 2006. Instead of investing in education, infrastructure and the economy, Hamas lives and breathes death and destruction. Hamas spends all of its energy and resources terrorizing Israel and exploits the population of Gaza to meet that end.

Let me be very clear today: when the Palestinians say "days of rage", they mean "days of terrorism". When the Palestinians say "right of return", they mean "destruction of Israel". And when the Palestinians say "peaceful protest", they mean "incitement and violence".

The common denominator throughout our history has been the following: the international community, with a few brave exceptions, does nothing to stop the Palestinians from trying to terrorize Israel on the world stage. But the fact is that whoever supports the Palestinian ploy becomes a player in the cycle of death. Only by breaking this cycle of orchestrated riots, planned casualties and pleas for United Nations sympathy will justice truly be served.

Israel is marking two major milestones: we are celebrating 70 years since our people re-established our sovereignty and independence by founding the State of Israel in the land of Israel, and we are welcoming with gratitude President Trump's decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem, our ancient and eternal capital. This was a step towards peace, because in any peace agreement Jerusalem will be Israel's capital. Everyone who claims that the decision to move

the United States embassy is a reason or a justification for Palestinian violence should take another look at history. This is an excuse, not a reason for violence against Israel.

If this body truly seeks to uphold security, justice and truth, then it will stop right here and now, condemn this terror and reaffirm Israel's right to defend itself.

The Security Council must set the standard of behaviour. It must tell Hamas that violence is not the answer. Members must ask themselves what they would do — what each one would do — if a violent mob of tens of thousands was threatening to cross their sovereign borders to attack their people? What would they do if their people were faced with terror attacks day in and day out? The Council must not give in to the cycle of death that the Palestinians have created; it must call out lies when it sees them, condemn Hamas's violence and place itself on the side of truth and the right side of history.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8257

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8257th meeting
Tuesday, 15 May 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2018/411)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-14793 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2018/411)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/437, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/411, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Somalia.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2415 (2018).

The meeting rose at 3.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8258

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8258th meeting
Tuesday, 15 May 2018, 3.10 p.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

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18-14799 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/455, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2416 (2018).

I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (the Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are always interested to inform the Security Council of the Sudan's position on the various questions raised in the Council that are related to its interests. Hence, I would like to seize this opportunity to deliver this statement.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Council for the spirit of cooperation and consensus that enabled it today to adopt resolution 2416 (2018), on the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for six months. I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of my country to cooperating with UNISFA and enabling it to implement its mandate, as per Council resolution 1990 (2011).

The security and stability in Abyei and the remarkable progress in entrenching the notions of peaceful coexistence between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka, as reaffirmed in the reports before the Council today, is the direct result of the concerted efforts of the Government and the positive roles played by UNISFA since its establishment. We stress that it is important for all parties to exert concerted efforts to enhance security and stability and to refrain from any action that might undermine this positive atmosphere. They should also avoid any decisions that are not well calculated until the final status of Abyei is defined according to agreed legal parameters, to which we are fully committed. Until then, Abyei will remain an integral part of the national territories of the Sudan, and the Sudan exercises full sovereignty over that territory.

I would like also like to take this opportunity to stress the centrality of the Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area, signed on 20 June 2011. It is the foundation for all the relevant arrangements on Abyei, including the deployment of UNISFA. The two parties to the Agreement — the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), succeeded by the Government of South Sudan since July 2011 — agreed that the Agreement should remain in force until the final status of Abyei had been defined. I would like to quote paragraph 41, given its importance:

> "This Agreement and the Abyei Protocol (except as modified by the terms herein) shall continue to apply until such time as the final status of Abyei has been resolved."

We would also like to recall article 29 of the Agreement, which links any amendment in the mandate in UNISFA with the agreement of the two parties to the Agreement:

> "The Government of Sudan and the SPLM will request the United Nations Security Council to approve the deployment and mandate of the ISFA, with the understanding that the mandate referred to in paragraph 27 of this Agreement shall not be changed without the agreement of the Government of the Sudan, the SPLM and the Government of Ethiopia."

My Government affirms its commitment to all agreements signed with the Government of South Sudan, starting with the 2004 Protocol on the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict, the Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area and the Cooperation Agreement, signed on 27 September 2012. We call on our brothers and sisters in the Government of South Sudan to seriously engage with the Government of the Sudan and the African Union in order to accelerate the establishment of Abyei institutions, as stated in the June 2011 Agreement. That includes the joint Abyei Area Administration, the joint Abyei Area Legislative Council and the joint Abyei Police Service.

The Council may agree with us that those institutions are indispensable in the administration of the Area and the provision of basic services to its people. It is important to enhance peaceful coexistence among the communities there, as well as to create conditions conducive to settling the final status of Abyei in a manner that fulfils the aspirations of all stakeholders and is acceptable to all parties.

The Council may also agree that abiding by agreements in general is another example of what we mean by maintaining international peace and security. International peace and security are threatened by the pretexts given when agreements are violated. History teaches the lesson in that respect over and over.

I would like to stress the importance of considering Abyei in the broader framework of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan and the development of internal relations in each country. In that regard, we stress that the path towards sustainable peace and stability in the Abyei Area and along the borders between the Sudan and South Sudan is based on two main pillars, namely, the implementation of the Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area and the implementation of all agreements included in the cooperation agreement signed on 27 September 2012. The latter laid a strong foundation for the normalization of relations between the two countries and enhanced cooperation in all areas, as well as the sustainability of peace between the two countries. It covers such areas as oil, trade, borders, debts, security arrangements, civilian affairs and other important aspects.

The joint communiqué of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan and South Sudan dated 23 September 2017 and addressed to the Security Council and the Secretary-General was intended, in the first place, to maintain the state of stability prevailing in Abyei. We should make no mistake about that fact. Maintaining such a state is the key condition for implementing the signed agreements. Maintaining this state of peace and security is a goal in itself. We therefore approach with a great deal of caution any direct or indirect statement that might undermine this state. We do have reservations on the content of paragraph 6 of resolution 2416 (2018), namely, the reference to the 2012 proposal of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel, which confirms the Government of the Sudan's rejection of the Panel in the past. We stress that this reference will have negative impacts on the communities living in Abyei and might lead to violence among them.

In conclusion, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to all partners whose efforts facilitate the work of UNISFA, particularly the Government of Ethiopia, the African Union Peace and Security Council, the African Union Commission and the High-Level Implementation Panel, as well as the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, and the entire staff of UNISFA. We once again reaffirm the Sudan's cooperation with UNISFA to discharge all its tasks in an uninterrupted manner, pursuant to resolution 1990 (2011) and subsequent resolutions.

The meeting rose at 3.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8259

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8259th meeting

Tuesday, 15 May 2018, 3.25 p.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2018/411)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2018/411)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, and Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Mr. Keating and Mr. Madeira are joining this meeting via video tele-conference from Mogadishu.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/411, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Somalia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Keating.

Mr. Keating: At the outset, let me to express my best wishes to members of the Security Council and to Somalis around the world at the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, a time of peace, forgiveness and compassion.

Events in the past 48 hours in Somalia serve to highlight the complexity of the situation facing its people. Today saw the conclusion in Mogadishu of the National Constitutional Convention, a milestone marked by strong commitment to an inclusive constitutional review process with clear and ambitious targets. That augurs well for strengthening the rule of law and stability and advancing reconciliation.

Today happens to be the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Somali Youth League. Celebratory events around the country are highlighting the needs and ambitions of today's young Somalis, many of whom lack education and job opportunities and, as a result, feel marginalized.

In Baidoa, federal member state Presidents are meeting in the Council of Interstate Cooperation to prepare for engagement with the Federal Government on critical issues, such as security, resource and revenue sharing and relations with Gulf partners.

The African Union (AU) and the United Nations joint review team are meeting Somali and international actors in Somalia. The focus of discussions has been the implications of the national security transition plan for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

In Beledweyne, humanitarian colleagues are working round the clock with local authorities and communities to address the catastrophic consequences of floods for over 200,000 people. Forces from Somaliland and Puntland have been exchanging fire in Tukaraq and the region of Sool, with an as-yet-unknown number of casualties reported. There is a serious danger that that conflict could escalate, with devastating implications for local people, as well all Somalis.

There is a lot going on. To its great credit, unforeseen events are not deflecting the Federal Government from its determination to pursue an agenda embracing economic and financial reform, revenue generation, security sector reform and inclusive politics — all with a view to an irreversible and positive transformation of the country's prospects. That agenda deserves timely and coherent support from the Council and Somalia's international partners, while recognizing that the many risks facing the country need to be managed and mitigated.

The Government has vigorously pursued the objective of putting the country on a sounder economic and financial keel. In February the International Monetary Fund welcomed progress under the staff-monitored programme and reiterated its support to help Somalia reach a heavily indebted poor country decision point as soon as possible.

The High-Level Roundtable on Somalia held in Washington, D.C., on 19 April opened the path towards a pre-arrears clearance grant. That was a vote of confidence in the Government's achievements in engaging with the private sector, improving public financial management and increasing domestic revenues. A number of partners are already providing,

or now plan to increase, budget support, including the European Union, Norway, Sweden and Turkey.

Additional resources are needed to address the root causes of fragility, chronic poverty and low human development affecting the majority of the population. Longer-term investment is needed to build resilience to climate shocks and break the cycle of recurrent crises that cause much suffering and undermine the State-building process.

The humanitarian situation is not as bad as it was a year ago, but by any global measure it remains very grave. The *gu* rains and flooding have affected more than 718,000 people in the central and southern regions of Somalia. The consequences of the floods include large-scale population displacement, economic damage and diseases, including cholera. A rapid-response allocation to address flood response of up to $5.1 million has been endorsed and is pending final approval. The 2018 humanitarian response plan calls for $1.5 billion. As of today, the plan is only 24 per cent funded, and is therefore inadequate to support the flood relief operations under way. Allow me to use this occasion to appeal to international donors once again to provide generous and timely support, while thanking them for the prompt and unprecedented amount of funding that enabled the prevention of famine last year.

Success in raising revenues, attracting grants and budget support provides a firm basis not only for investment and creating jobs, but also for tackling Somalia's security and State-building challenges and strengthening relations with federal member states, not least through resource- and revenue-sharing agreements.

Insecurity remains a constant concern. Despite increasing pressure on the group, including an increase in air strikes, Al-Shabaab has continued to demonstrate its ability to execute deadly terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets, including AMISOM, notably through the use of improvised explosive devices. The factors that breed terrorism, including youth unemployment, corruption, a sense of injustice and unresolved conflicts, cannot be left until later. The truly formidable challenge facing Somalia and its AU and other partners is simultaneously to fight the insurgency and reform the security sector.

The President is leading defence reform. The Government is taking bold steps, including biometric registration, payroll reform and operational readiness assessments, while recognizing that much more needs to be done. The list includes — as the Prime Minister phrased it — turning the national security architecture into construction, agreeing the basis upon which regional forces will be integrated into the army and police, passing essential legislation, conducting asset inventories and weapons management and developing transparent procurement procedures and greater accountability.

A measure of progress is that the security transition plan was adopted by Somalia's Council of Ministers on 19 April. The plan is designed to build Somali operational and institutional capacity not only for the armed forces, but also in areas of the most basic security concern to the population, including justice, accountable local governance, freedom of movement and provision of services. The plan was endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Committee on 30 April and welcomed by all partners at the high-level security meeting held in Brussels on 2 May. The imperative now is to implement it. Critical will be ensuring national ownership and leadership of the plan through the National Security Council structures under Somali leadership.

AMISOM continues to play an indispensable role, at great human cost, in protecting population centres, main supply routes and Somalia's overall political progress. The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia will shortly address the many challenges that that entails. Suffice it to say that a successful security transition will require not just deep reform of the Somalia security forces, but also, as the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Envoys of the Secretary-General noted, transformation of AMISOM, whether relating to more flexible joint operations and combat mentoring, greater emphasis on policing, adequate enablers and force multipliers or stronger accountability systems, whether for assets or relating to human rights. More flexible operational support by the United Nations Support Office in Somalia will also be required, together with predictable financing.

The AU-United Nations joint review is likely to underscore that the foremost requirement for success is the need for unity of purpose among Somali actors, as well as among the Somalis, the African Union, troop-contributing countries and principal security partners. The comprehensive approach to security structures is designed to ensure coherent and coordinated approaches.

Somali politics remain as lively as ever, punctuated by crises relating to competition for power and resources, complicated by the weakness of Somali institutions and ambiguities in the provisional Federal Constitution, particularly with regard to relations among the three branches of Government, the growing pains associated with the emergence of federal arrangements and the role of untraceable money in the political marketplace. The most prominent fault lines have related to the impact of the Gulf dispute, the role of parliamentarians in politics and relations between the leaders of the federal member states and the Federal Government. Those issues both overlap and have distinct contours. The stand-off between the Federal Government and Parliament was resolved in early April when the Speaker of the House of the People resigned. The new Speaker was elected peacefully and inaugurated this past week. That creates an opportunity to fast-forward the legislative agenda, taking advantage of a phenomenon rare in Somali politics — unity among the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker.

But, as with tensions that continue between the Federal Government and federal member states, structural deficits may again contribute to future crises. Those need to be addressed, including through the electoral law and political party law, while moving towards a constitutionally compliant forum that brings the Federal Government and federal member state leadership together, and measures to regulate motions of no confidence and impeachment procedures, as well as nothing less than a campaign to fight corruption.

The role of the United Nations and international community continues to be to insist upon adherence to the rule of law, inclusive processes and zero-tolerance for the use of violence by any party in the resolution of political disputes. Sometimes that results in us being accused by one side or another of being biased, but I believe that the record will speak for itself in terms of consistent support for a gradual change in Somali political culture.

Relations among powerful Somali actors are being tested as a result of the Gulf dispute, with actors taking positions that accord with their economic interests, security and political objectives. Somalia needs respectful relations with all its international partners, recognizing that it is the prerogative of the Federal Government to lead foreign policy and that member states need to be fully consulted if they are to support policies that have a direct bearing on them.

The best way to minimize the impact of the Gulf dispute is through greater Somali unity. It is ordinary Somalis that will suffer the most from a failure by political leaders to resolves those issues, whether through the constitutional review or through ad interim agreements. The upcoming National Security Council session provides an opportunity to do that under the President's leadership. Disputes that result in the reduction of aid flows and economic ties, or that increase tensions and the risk of violent conflict, only play into the hands of extremists and retard the State-building agenda that Somalia has set for itself in the coming year.

With regard to the dispute in Tukaraq, the facts are still coming in, but fighting has erupted and there are reports of deaths and casualties. I associate myself fully with President Farmajo's call a few hours ago for an immediate ceasefire and a resumption of political dialogue between the leaders of Somaliland and Puntland. In the past few days, both President Bihi Abdi of Somaliland and President Gaas of Puntland have assured me that they want to avoid, and cannot afford, hostilities. The approach of Ramadan makes a ceasefire particularly important.

At risk is not only the welfare of hundreds of thousands of people and the possibility of mass displacement at a time when humanitarian funds are already low, but the remarkable progress that both Somaliland and Puntland have made over the years. Conflict could unravel more than 20 years of relatively peaceful coexistence. I urge Council members to engage with all concerned to reduce tensions and discourage those who may be seeking advantage from that situation.

The Tukaraq crisis could distract attention from the progress that has been made in resolving conflicts elsewhere, notably in Galkayo, which is more peaceful today than for many years, as well as in Merka in Lower Shabelle and Galmudug, where, despite the hurdles, there is forward momentum. The Government is moving forward with a national reconciliation framework, supported by the United Nations and other partners, recognizing that the many conflicts in Somalia, whether over resources, clan disputes or federal state formation, need to benefit from the engagement of civil society, women and youth groups, the business sector, traditional elders and conflict mediation experts.

Unfortunately, the human rights situation remains deeply problematic, with many groups being particularly vulnerable, including women, internally displaced persons, minorities and journalists. The signing of the joint programme on human rights in February was a positive step towards strengthening protection frameworks. I urge the Federal Government to move forward the process of establishing the human rights commission.

The situation of children affected by armed conflict remains dire, with a marked increase in abductions and the recruitment and the use of children. Impunity for sexual violence continues to be of great concern. I strongly urge the Federal Government to enact the sexual offences bill, which will strengthen the legal framework and reduce impunity for crimes of sexual violence.

In conclusion, the people of Somalia continue to face extraordinary challenges. They are fortunate to have a Government that is serious about tackling them. Key to its success will be unity among Somali leaders, complemented by the coherent support of the Council and the broader international community.

The President: I thank Mr. Keating for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Madeira.

Mr. Madeira: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in Somalia. Addressing the Council remains a great honour and privilege for me.

As we approach Ramadan, the advancement of peace and security in Somalia continues to be attainable today through the concerted effort of the Somali national security forces, the African Union Mission forces and the visible action by the Government of Somalia to bring into play the factors that contribute to the enhancement and consolidation of stability through a comprehensive approach to a security framework. I pay tribute to the brave sacrifices that Somali national security forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) have continued to make over the years with a view to building a peaceful and prosperous Somalia.

Since my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.8165), Somalia has been confronted with many challenges, some of which, if not addressed in a timely manner, will negatively impact the current efforts of the Federal Government and reverse the progress made so far. As we speak, AMISOM soldiers are valiantly supporting and assisting the populations of Beledweyne, on the margins of the Shabelle River, who have been flooded out and have had to abandon their homes as a result. They are doing that with immense sacrifice in the middle of a shortage of means of transportation and resources to support the population. But they are receiving profound support from the President of HirShabelle.

That and other challenges have become more evident lately, with a spillover effect on Somalia over international rivalries and divisions within the Gulf countries. Those external crises are quickly provoking further divisions among Somalis and forcing them to choose sides. There are warning signs that the crisis could have negative implications for the fragile relations between the Federal Government of Somalia and its federal member states. I ask the Council to make a strong and unequivocal statement to the opposing sides in the Gulf region to refrain from any actions that may further heighten tensions and affect the unity and stability of Somalia.

A year ago Somalia was presented with a fresh start with the election of President Farmajo and the appointment of Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre. They offered an important opportunity for the rebuilding of Somalia's national institutions and providing the country with what it needs to foster unity and prosperity. Recent political crises in Parliament not only heightened the absolute need to expedite the building and strengthening of Somali State institutions but also the importance for all parties in the Somali political construct to begin to identify and embrace the common factors that unite all Somalis and do away with those divisive issues that are ongoing sources of weakness, tension and division among them. The people speak the same language. They belong to the same nation. They have the same aspirations. They profess only one religion. The best use of such attributes can effectively contribute to fortifying the unity and peace in this great country.

In that context, AMISOM applauds the efforts made by the executive and the former Speaker in resolving the recent crisis, the outcome of which offers hope for a brighter future for all Somalis. As the new Speaker, Mr. Mohamed Mursal Abdirahman, indicated in his inaugural address last week, the Federal Parliament will refocus its efforts to ensure that the constitutional review is completed and pave the way for multi-party elections to move forward with the necessary legal

framework by 2020 or 2021. The holding, earlier this week, of the national constitutional convention in Mogadishu is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to match its words with action.

Despite challenges, there is real reason for optimism across Somalia, as the Federal Government continues to make great strides in the right direction. The executive is already delivering on improving fiscal management and strengthening the financial institutions, while placing transparency and the fight against corruption at the heart of its economic priorities. We now have a federal budget that is supported by realistic revenue measures and an effort to modernize the urgently needed tax collection and taxpayer registration. That is in addition to the ongoing consultations on tax legislation.

While delivering all of this, the Government is also focusing on financial sustainability through its domestic revenue collection. In a similar vein, the Government bill for the establishment of the anti-corruption commission is taking shape, with the implementation of the open government initiative. With the Government's recent announcement off its third International Monetary Fund staff-monitored programme and its success at this year's spring meetings in Washington, D.C., Somalia's pathway to debt relief is fast becoming a reality.

In April, as Council members are aware, the Somali transition plan was widely endorsed, first here in Mogadishu by the Comprehensive Approach to Security Executive Group, chaired by Prime Minister Khayre, and later by the African Union during the Peace and Security Council on Addis Ababa on 30 April. Supporting the Federal Government in implementing the transition plan remains AMISOM's key priority. As I reminded partners during the high-level security meeting on Somalia in Brussels earlier this month, AMISOM endorsed, and is firmly committed to, the implementation of the transition plan.

AMISOM is currently undergoing its fourth review pursuant to its mandate under Security resolution 2372 (2017). In the past three days, AMISOM has been clear: in order to effectively support the transition, the Mission must adjust its approach and reconfigure its components to suit the demands of the transition. We are ready to undertake such an exercise. In that regard, AMISOM uniformed personnel will require the following: additional multipliers and enablers; a mandate to conduct combat-readiness mentoring for the Somali security forces, availed to them and co-located; to undertake joint, well-coordinated operations with AMISOM; and a more flexible approach to its logistical support from the United Nations and other partners. The civilian component will require consideration of the strengthening of its capacity and presence in the field across the federal member states.

As AMISOM and the Federal Government begin focusing on the stadium and the main supply routes from Mogadishu to Baidoa and the town of Leego as top priority objectives in the first phase of the transition, it is important that the international community's efforts be directed towards addressing the gaps identified in the last operational readiness assessment of the Somali National army, the police and local forces. Efforts must seek to provide a swift response to issues of force generation at both the federal and regional levels in Somalia, in addition to satisfying key operational requirements such as communications, transport, casualty evacuation, medical evacuation, supplies and logistics, as well as IED defeat capabilities.

In the coming weeks and months, AMISOM and the Somali security forces will be implementing the operational phase of the transition plan. To be effective and attain its objectives, the transition cannot continue spending resources and losing lives to recover towns and territory from Al-Shabaab only to see them returned to the enemy. The transition, as it has been conceived, must be comprehensive and effective, that is to say, it must bring on board everything that is required for the effective recovery, occupation and permanent holding on towns and cities, and the effective protection of their population.

We must therefore ensure that the population centres and locations we capture from Al-Shabaab are recovered and transformed into inhabitable places where humanitarian agencies provide emergency assistance to the liberated population; administrators manage the liberated population, govern the town and provide essential services and amenities to the population; police protect the citizens and maintain law and order; conditions are created for the local economy to beginning to take shape, for trade and commerce to be possible and for citizens to be able to go about their lives freely, securely and confidently without fear of being mugged or killed by Al-Shabaab around the next corner.

All that requires commitment. It requires the Government to be present and fully committed to

creating institutions. It requires United Nations agencies to engage in strengthening the institutions of Government and local administrations. They must be present and fully committed in the places we are going to liberate, starting with Leego. We are ready and willing to work hand in hand with the United Nations and other institutions, as well as the Government, to realize those objectives — to ensure that once we liberate a city it transitions to Somali security forces and remains in their hands, not falling back into those of Al-Shabaab.

The reality of the current threat landscape across Somalia is that Al-Shabaab has gradually increased its military capacity and resilience, resulting in widespread attacks using IEDs as the weapon of choice. To successfully and sustainably counter that threat and disrupt and destroy Al-Shabaab, I urge the Council to remain seized of the issue of predictable and sustainable funding for AMISOM and the Somali security forces, and the provision to our forces of the means and enablers required to minimize casualties, defeat IEDs and identify and neutralize the enemy.

In that regard, I would like to express AMISOM's gratitude to the United States Department of State for the provision of the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance system, which is a very important force enabler. As we speak, the system and its effect are already being felt in the theatre of operations. We are grateful that partners have started to understand the full meaning of the reality in which we are living. The recent meeting in Brussels showed that partners are now ready to be generous in terms of supporting both the Somali national security forces and AMISOM in strengthening their capacity to face Al-Shabaab successfully.

The President: I thank Mr. Madeira for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As on previous occasions and on behalf of the delegation I represent, I would first of all like to thank Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), and his team for the clear and detailed briefing on the most recent developments in the country. His briefing reflects a situation that is of concern, in particular with regard to issues of State-building, the strengthening of security institutions and economic fragility.

Somalia has made very significant progress since successful parliamentary and presidential elections transferred power to the current President, Mr. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, nearly a year ago. He outlined a political programme that convinced his own people, as well as the international community, and encouraged international partners to continue to support the process of national reconstruction. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to take this opportunity to express its gratitude and appreciation to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other international actors for their contributions to address the major challenges encountered during this important political process.

In spite of international support, Somalia continues to face monumental challenges, first and foremost the mighty threat posed by the Al-Shabaab terrorist organization, which, despite financial pressures and counter-terrorism activities, including air strikes, continues to commit murders and detonate bombs throughout the country. That ongoing threat could be linked to the country's socioeconomic ills, such as the lack of educational and work opportunities for young people, unfulfilled demands flowing from unresolved disputes, a weak national justice system and the interests of third parties.

The differences between some leaders of a number of federal states and the federal authorities constitute a major obstacle to reforms seeking to promote national reconciliation and reconstruction. To that end, Somali politicians should commit to understanding each other in order to create a healthy political environment that encourages support from, and collaboration with, international actors. Nonetheless, we commend President Farmajo and other politicians on their efforts to promote national reconciliation, as demonstrated by the smooth election of the former Minister of Defence as the new Speaker of Parliament following the resignation of his predecessor, ending weeks of political crisis that could have increased the security threat. However, more must be done. We also commend the President, who, in spite of insecurity in the country, decided to visit the federal states of Puntland and Gamuldug in an attempt to address their problems.

Despite all that, and according to reliable reports on the situation, Somali security and State institutions are not yet able to provide proper security and socioeconomic conditions throughout the country in

the short and medium term. Therefore, the work and support of UNSOM, AMISOM and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia continue to be indispensable. We believe it is important to secure prior funding to enable efforts to continue.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), Mr. Michael Keating, and the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Mr. Francisco Madeira, for their briefings at today's meeting.

We begin by commending the United Nations and the African Union on their coordinated and joint efforts in Somalia to build peace, rebuild the State, strengthen the rule of law, reform the security sector and achieve other important goals. Their work reflects relevant ongoing efforts to seek stability and security in the country and the region. The continuous support and assistance provided by AMISOM, UNSOM and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia should reflect a high degree of transparency and information-sharing to enable the Federal Government of Somalia to continue its efforts to counter the serious threat posed by terrorist groups and with regard to constitutional structure in order to strengthen the Federal State. We believe that stabilizing Somalia should be achieved mainly by formalizing the status of the federal member states, implementing the security strategy, building resilience and promoting socioeconomic transformation. The Government of Somalia must determine its priorities according to its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We commend the President of Somalia on his recent visits to various regions of the country in order to step up and accelerate efforts at dialogue and reconciliation. At the political level, the political road map for inclusive politics for the period 2017-2020, outlined by the Council of Ministers of the Federal Government, along with the efforts of the National Security Council, has led to significant progress, which we believe will be mutually beneficial for the Federal Government and for federal states.

With regard to security, we believe that it is essential that the transition plan developed by Federal Government be reflected when the security, military and police forces, as well as the judiciary and correction authorities, are fully operational. Similarly in that area, we note that it is imperative that Somali ownership develops within a relationship based on trust, consensus and inclusiveness among the Federal Government and federal states alike. In addition, UNSOM support to the National Intelligence and Security Agency is vital to improve the capacity required for demobilization, reintegration and disarmament and weapons and maritime security management.

Bolivia fully supports all African Union efforts to implement mediation, preventive diplomacy and dialogue initiatives to promote a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict. We highlight the meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on 30 April, during which it committed to providing full support to Somalia in achieving its transition goals. Nonetheless, we believe that the Security Council, the United Nations and the international community as a whole must continue to work together to build the capacity of AMISOM to ensure that the Somali security forces can assume full responsibility for maintaining their country's security in the near future.

Al-Shabaab continues to pose a latent threat to Somalia. The attacks perpetrated by that terrorist group have again served to underscore the importance of identifying measures to counter it, in particular in Mogadishu, where attacks carried out with improvised explosive devices, car bombs and heavy weaponry have claimed the lives of hundreds and caused major damage. We also note with alarm the ongoing high levels of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls, particularly those who have been forcibly displaced.

Finally, but no less important, is economic transformation. Bolivia believes that in order to ensure lasting, sustainable peace and to alleviate the fragility of the Somali State, there is a need to reform the security sector, and the international community must work to restructure its external debt, as in a post-conflict phase there cannot be sustainable peace without development, and there can be no development if this important issue is not resolved.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our gratitude for the convening of this afternoon's meeting and our thanks for the briefings we have heard from Mr. Keating and Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira.

Peru has been keeping a close eye on the situation in Somalia, where, despite the progress made in recent months, the humanitarian crisis continues to affect more than 5 million people. In addition, the security situation remains unstable, and human rights, including those of women and children, continue to be violated.

We deem positive the new focus adopted to address the humanitarian situation through the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia and the recovery and resilience framework, which are aimed at breaking the cycle of vulnerability and deprivation by 2022. We highlight also the significant progress made by Somalia in the economic area, which has been acknowledged by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We hope that the technical support provided by those institutions will make it possible to implement the economic reforms necessary to improve the living conditions of the Somali people.

We condemn the attacks committed by Al-Shabaab and support the Secretary-General's call for the Federal Government and international partners to develop a coherent approach to mitigating the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, which are often used by that terrorist group.

We underline also the importance of the transition plan as a vehicle for the Somali authorities to assume full responsibility for security. Said transfer must be implemented in an orderly and gradual manner, so as to safeguard the existing achievements. We also highlight the need for the provision of the financial support required for coordinated implementation by the Federal Government and the federal states, backed by the African Union and international partners.

We welcome the significant headway made in the strengthening of Somali security institutions, including the new police model adopted at the state and federal levels, the political agreement on the justice and corrections model for Somalia, as well as initiatives to curb violent extremism. We welcome also the efforts of the Federal Government to promote the peace and reconciliation process, as well as the rollout of the peace process aimed at easing tensions between clans in Marka.

We hope that, now that the political crisis in the Federal Parliament is behind us and the new Speaker of the House of the People has taken up his post, Somalia will be able to undertake the institutional efforts required to sustain peace, including power-sharing, resource management, the allocation of fiscal revenues and the electoral model. We emphasize the importance of the National Security Council moving forward in the implementation of the road map to prepare for the general elections, to be exercised by universal suffrage in 2020-2021, prioritizing the constitutional review process and the establishment of an electoral legal framework.

We deem it important to promote the active participation of women in national processes, particularly given that Somalia is a country marred by high levels of sexual violence. We wish to pay tribute to the victim-advocacy work carried out by the United Nations Population Fund. Likewise, we commend the initiatives aimed at empowering young Somalis, in particular the establishment of an interim national youth council and the launch of the Open Innovation Challenge, which is led by young people and aimed at finding solutions to the plight of internally displaced persons in Somalia.

We also wish to welcome the strategy of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) to achieve gender parity in its ranks by 2021 and the appointment of a gender adviser to the National Independent Electoral Commission. We also voice our support for UNSOM and stress our expectations regarding its proposals aimed at an appropriate reconfiguration of the components required for an effective implementation of the broad security approach of the Mission, the national security structure and the transition plan.

I wish to conclude by underscoring the need for the Gulf countries to lend their support to the Federal Government of Somalia as it seeks to improve its relations with its federal member states and undertake reforms aimed at State-building.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation wishes to thank Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), for his presentation of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of UNSOM and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) (S/2018/411). My delegation wishes also to thank Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

My statement will focus mainly on developments in the political, security and humanitarian situation in Somalia.

On the political situation, my country welcomes the improved relations between the Federal Government and the federal states, which led to an agreement on financial and operational support for the regional security forces in the framework of their incorporation into the state police forces. My country welcomes also the progress made in the establishment of a functioning federal State in Somalia, including the adoption by the various parties of the political road map for the period 2017-2020, the establishment of the memorandum of understanding on the constitutional review process, the involvement of the federal authorities in the various national reconciliation initiatives, and the progress achieved in preparing for the 2020-2021 elections by universal suffrage.

On this last point, my country welcomes the inclusive approach adopted by the National Independent Electoral Commission in the context of consultations aimed at overcoming possible obstacles to the holding of free, democratic and transparent elections.

However, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned at the continuing tensions in the federal Parliament and the resulting impact on the adoption of several draft laws that are essential for building the Somali State. We urge the Somali political actors to resolutely engage themselves in building a strong and prosperous Somali State. Côte d'Ivoire therefore welcomes the appointment of the new Speaker of the House of the People and hopes that this will lead to a constructive relationship between the country's legislative and executive powers.

On the security front, it is clear that despite the air strikes against the strongholds of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group, the latter continues to pose a serious threat to security in Somalia, as evidenced by the attacks carried out during the first quarter of this year against Somali national army soldiers and those of AMISOM. These attacks confirm once again the need for the international community, including the Council, to support Somalia in its security-sector reform process in order to enable the effective implementation of the transition plan aimed at a handover of responsibilities from AMISOM to the country's security forces.

My country calls upon all national and international actors working in Somalia to pool their efforts in providing operational and financial support for the successful implementation of the Somali transition plan.

In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire commends the support provided by UNSOM, UNSOS and the other United Nations agencies present in Somalia to the Somali security institutions in the framework of the strengthening of their operational capacities. We note with satisfaction that the Somali authorities, in spite of the difficulties encountered, continue to work towards the implementation of the national security architecture through, inter alia, the incorporation of the regional security forces into the national army.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the commitment of the Federal Government and the federal states to work together constructively in building a State based on the rule of law, as demonstrated by the signing of an agreement on the justice and corrections model in Somalia. It also encourages the leaders of the federal states to accelerate their justice and corrections plan.

My country remains concerned about the increasingly worrisome humanitarian situation. According to the Secretary-General's report, the level of malnutrition is among the highest in the world, as 5.4 million people require humanitarian assistance, with 2.1 million others displaced and dependent on international support. That situation is exacerbated by floods as a result of heavy rains in several parts of the country in recent weeks, leading to the destruction of crops and people's properties and significantly reducing their means of livelihood. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to date approximately 718,000 people have been affected by the floods.

Humanitarian needs continue to increase, while the humanitarian aid plan developed for 2018 is only 19 per cent funded. Given that situation, while recognizing the considerable financial and material efforts already made, my delegation encourages international partners and donors to mobilize in order to contribute to the financing of the 2018 humanitarian assistance plan and to respond urgently to the humanitarian needs of the Somalis in need.

Like the Secretary-General, Côte d'Ivoire also urges the Somali authorities and its development partners to draw up an integrated strategy in order to find viable solutions to the root causes of the famine in the country.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates its thanks to UNSOM, UNSOS and all international partners working in Somalia for the multifaceted assistance that they continue to provide to the country under very difficult conditions. We call on them to further coordinate their efforts and strategy in support of Somalia.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Francisco Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia.

A little more than a year has passed since the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo in Somalia. The new Government was able to develop an effective plan of action, including financial sector reform, job creation, a social cohesion policy, conflict resolution and security sector reform. We commend and support the efforts and the political will of the Federal Government of Somalia and of the federal member states for strengthening ties and for promoting State-building and peacebuilding by initiating dialogue on defining a federal model. At the same time, it is important to follow up with steps to formalize agreements on the division of powers, the management of resources and the sharing of revenues.

We welcome the efforts of the National Independent Electoral Commission to conduct nation-wide consultations aimed at identifying the optimal electoral model. To build on that, the electoral legal framework needs to be adopted so as to organize the 2020-2021 universal elections.

We remain concerned about the continuing attacks by Al-Shabaab on the Somali National Army (SNA) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the causing of civilian casualties, which is exacerbated by inter-clan violence. The AMISOM troops who provide secuity on the front line play a critical role in the restoration of State authority. However, the predictable and sustainable funding of the Mission remains a challenge for its adequate operationalization.

We welcome the efforts of the Federal Government and the regional Governments to continue the work on the integration of the regional armed forces into the Somali National Army and the police as an integral part of the national security architecture. It is vital that international partners continue to provide coordinated support for building the capacity of the SNA in more coherent manner.

We also commend the Federal Government of Somalia for finalizing the transition plan. Realistic time frames and conditions are necessary to comply with the outlined priority tasks and benchmarks. In implementing that comprehensive agenda, the Federal Government faces a number of serious problems. In particular, the financial situation is acute. There is a need for a coordinated approach on the part of national and international actors in order to establish effective cooperation and confidence-building measures between the Federal Government and the member states.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the attention of members to my visit to the Horn of Africa last week in my capacity as Chair of the Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009), concerning Somalia and Eritrea. A report will be presented in the near future. In the meantime, having observed it at first hand, we acknowledge the work of the United Nations country team and the European Union in promoting local peace initiatives, peacebuilding and national reconciliation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): As this is the first time that my delegation addresses the Security Council during your presidency, Madam President, allow me to begin by congratulating you and your delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May. I wish you every success in your leadership. Let me also take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Keating and Ambassador Madeira for their briefings.

At today's meeting of the Security Council on Somalia, I would like to share with members the fact that it is also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding, on 15 May 1943, of the first political party in Somalia — the Somali Youth League, which has done much to advance the Somali cause. Indeed, the youth party was singularly instrumental in achieving the independence and unity of the Somali people in 1960. In the process, it helped to create one of Africa's first democracies. The optimism and hope created by the Somali Youth League nearly a century ago are also a major source of our current optimism for achieving peace and prosperity, thereby leading towards a resurgent Somalia.

On this occasion, I would also like share the sad news of the passing away, at the age of 89 years, of

Ambassador Abdulrahim Abby Farah, one of our most prominent Somali diplomats, who served as Permanent Representative of Somalia to the United Nations. He also held several high-level positions at the Organization. I take this opportunity to also convey our thoughts and prayers to his family and the Somali people around the world.

We believe that supporting and safeguarding our hard-earned political stability is a prerequisite for the long road ahead in terms of security, economic development and recovery. In the current report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/411) we are concerned about the inclusion of some inaccurate statements on the political situation, which could jeopardize the legitimacy of the Government, as well as our national reconstruction efforts. While the report covers most developments that have occurred in the period under review, we suggest that there is a room to more adequately address the political progress and developments on the ground. However, we are happy to note that the tensions within Parliament mentioned in current report have been resolved. That is clear testimony to the resilience of the Somali people and their capacity to absorb political shocks and to engage in peaceful, lasting and democratic solutions while respecting parliamentary rules of procedures, as well as our Constitution.

A little more than a year ago, President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo joined our international partners at the London Somalia Conference and made a steadfast commitment to accelerating progress on security sector reform and to setting security as a priority for his Administration. Since the previous meeting of the Council (see S/PV.8215), tangible progress on that commitment has been made. Somalia has developed a realistic, phased and conditions-based transition plan, working closely and collaboratively with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs), the United Nations and the European Union, as well as other key partners. That process was inclusive and comprehensive and included field consultations to incorporate the perspective of local stakeholders, including federal member states.

The transition plan was endorsed by the Somali Cabinet and by the African Union Peace and Security Council. It sets out the strategic guidelines that will enable detailed planning over the next few years. It places a particular focus on the institutional capacity-building of our forces, while at the same time outlining the necessary security operations and supporting stabilization efforts.

As we prepare for the transition plan, I take this opportunity to thank the TCCs and PCCs that have contributed their forces for their honorable and courageous sacrifices. The support provided by the United Nations to AMISOM should also be acknowledged and must be continued in order to continue the momentum. My Government welcomes the appointment of Ambassador Lisa Filipetto of Australia as Head of the United Nations Support Office in Somalia. The gains made by AMISOM and our national armed forces against Al-Shabaab over the past year are astonishing. Nonetheless, we recognize that Al-Shabaab will not be defeated by military means alone.

The stabilization efforts undertaken with the support of our international partners are just as critical in helping us to adddress the roort causes of fragility and conflict in our communities. It is our firm belief that our credibility and legitimacy as a Government hinge on our ability to promote social reconciliation and good governance and provide public services to help improve the lives of our citizens. We know that the Somali National Army (SNA) faces challenges, but we believe that the only way to implement the transition is to commit the SNA to undertake joint operations with AMISOM and the support of international partners. That would help acquire the requisite experience, self-confidence and capacity to undertake major operations and eventually assume the responsibility for the security of the whole country.

President Farmajo and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire are sparing no effort to reconcile the people of Somalia and provide a national vision that will further enhance national unity and reconciliation. The transition plan will therefore become the centrepiece of security sector reform in Somalia, as it is rooted in our national security architecture, which is closely interlinked with the President's two other priorities, namely, inclusive politics and economic reforms.

Following the World Bank and International Monetary Fund spring meetings in Washington, D.C., this year, we, the Federal Government of Somalia, are now closer than ever in our efforts to normalize our relations with international financial institutions and on a pathway to eventual debt relief.

Meanwhile, on the political front, the Federal Government of Somalia, together with the federal member states, continues to work to implement an ambitious political road map that includes the revision of the provisional Constitution and the preparation for the next elections, in 2020, which will require the renewed focus of Parliament in the swift passage of key legislation that is currently pending approval. We believe that the peaceful election of a new Speaker in Parliament will enable this process and advance the legislative agenda.

I would now like to turn to the statement made by President Farmajo on the unfortunate flare-up of hostilities in Tukaraq and El Afweyn, in the Sool region of the Somali Republic. In that connection, the President appealed to all the parties concerned to stop all hostilities immediately. President Farmajo urged leaders, elders and civil society to negotiate for peace and an agreeable coexistence and to resolve their differences through dialogue and respect for the sanctity of life. He also expressed his deep regret over the loss of Somali lives in this recent conflict, sent his heartfelt condolences to the families affected and prayed for the quick recovery of the wounded.

In conclusion, Somalia's challenges remain significant, including our vulnerability to extreme weather, the long-term demands of State-building and tackling active and vicious terrorist groups. All of that requires long-term work in order to address the structural, political and legacy issues of corruption, including the lack of oversight and accountability in the status quo, and building and resourcing legitimate institutions. But we are on the right path. The continued support of the Council will enable us to continue to make progress and to shift the perception of Somalia from decline to growth and from weakness to resilience.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to continue or discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8260

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8260th meeting
Wednesday, 16 May 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	M. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. De Mistura is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: When I last briefed the Security Council on 9 April, it was at an emergency meeting (see S/PV.8225). On that occasion, I warned of the threats to regional and international peace and security arising from developments in or related to Syria. I know that today it is not an emergency meeting. However, the circumstances of an emergency very much remain. I do not need to remind members that tensions are high and regional and international confrontations have occurred several times. Allow me to highlight some recent events since 9 April.

On 13 April, the United States, France and the United Kingdom conducted missile strikes in response to the allegations of the use of chemical weapons in eastern Ghouta. Those countries say that the strikes targeted three research and production facilities near Damascus and Homs.

On 29 April, strikes were reported on Syrian Government military facilities in Hamah and Aleppo. Some media outlets attributed those strikes to Israel, alleging that those killed included Iranian personnel. Neither Israel nor Iran responded to those claims.

On 8 May, strikes were reported just south of Damascus. Syrian State media attributed those strikes to Israel. Israel did not confirm that claim. Israel then said that it had detected "irregular Iranian activity" in the occupied Golan, which it put on high alert.

Between 9 and 10 May, Israel carried out dozens of strikes against presumed Iranian and Syrian Government military targets across southern Syria. The Israeli authorities claim that they were responding to Iranian forces firing rockets from Syrian territory at Israeli military targets in the occupied Syrian Golan. Iran condemned the Israeli strikes and denied those claims.

We are not is a position to independently verify every aspect of those incidents. However, even an incomplete picture shows the troubling trajectory of the increasingly frequent and ever more intense international confrontations over Syria, unprecedented since 1973.

As the Security Council knows, the Secretary-General has followed those developments with great concern and called for restraint by all parties in order to avoid any acts that could escalate the situation and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people. The Secretary-General stressed that the United Nations has a

> "duty to remind Member States that there is an obligation, particularly when dealing with matters of peace and security, to act consistently with the Charter of the United Nations, and with international law in general." *(S/PV.8233, p. 2)*

On the issue of chemical weapons, let me again echo the Secretary-General's call for the Security Council to

> "agree on a dedicated mechanism for ensuring effective accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria" (*ibid.*).

As the Council well knows, as of now, we await the results of the ongoing investigation by the Fact-finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons following its visit to Douma, with a report to be issued to States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

However, we have also seen worrying developments elsewhere in Syria. Evacuations from eastern Ghouta were similarly repeated in the eastern Qalamoun area, southern Damascus and northern rural Homs.

First, on the military escalation, the pattern has been one of incoming air strikes and artillery and outgoing mortars and rockets towards Damascus. Then there was a negotiation, followed by an agreement for the evacuation of those civilians and fighters unwilling to remain under Syrian Government control or Russian Federation protection guarantees. We have also seen similar evacuation agreements

being discussed in Idlib province but in a completely different format — the reverse format. This time we are talking about civilians and fighters in Government-controlled areas, namely, Kafraya and Fo'ah, while considering evacuations — beginning with medical evacuations — following the three-year siege and intermittent attacks from armed groups surrounding that area.

Let me share with the Council a recurrent concern that I know that all members have. If civilians and fighters are simply funnelled into northern Syria — mostly into Idlib — then that might only postpone another conflict affecting many additional people, which I will discuss later. Therefore, it is important to keep close watch on future developments in Idlib province. Meanwhile, civilians continue to pay a terrible price. To be precise, 110,000 people have been evacuated to north-western Syria and Operation Euphrates Shield areas in the past two months. Many of them are reportedly traumatized and in urgent need of assistance and protection. Humanitarian partners are overwhelmed and stretched quite thin by the scale of those evacuations, but continue to do their utmost to respond to the growing needs, with the Council's assistance.

Returning to the topic of Idlib, if a Ghouta scenario were to play out there, the situation could be six times worse, affecting 2.3 million people, half of whom are already internally displaced and would have nowhere else to go. But that is not purely a question of the Syrians' suffering. We fear that any substantial escalation in Idlib, Dar'a or in the north-east might also result in risks not only to Syrian civilians, but also for international peace and security. As we know, many of those areas contain external and international forces. Conflict there might entail confrontations with those forces, thereby leading us down a slippery slope towards regional or potential international conflict. Therefore, discussions at the international level on how to prevent that and on de-escalation are needed, and, although they are taking place, they also need to be very intensive.

I was therefore very encouraged to see concrete discussions on de-escalation when I attended the ninth high-level Astana meeting yesterday, which covered the issue of Idlib in particular, as the three guarantors have a say and the means to avoid it. That round of discussions in Astana saw constructive discussions on how that might be achieved. While fully stressing the need to respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, we saw at first-hand the parties engage actively on how to avoid a worst-case scenario in Idlib. Moreover, the working group, of which the United Nations is a member and a proactive supporter — as hundreds of thousands of people in Syria expect of us — held its second meeting on the release of detainees, abductees and bodies, and on the identification of missing persons. The members of the working group held constructive discussions on practical and concrete steps to address that key humanitarian issue. The guarantors informed us that they have secured the parties' support — which, if confirmed, is good news — for the activities taking place under the auspices of the working group, which is a positive development. As it is a matter of preliminary discussions, I hope that we will see progress with regard to that complex issue at the working group's next meeting, which we understand will be held in Ankara.

De-escalation is indispensable, as the Syrians themselves are telling us, but it is only one of the ingredients necessary to move forward the political process. We also need to overcome concrete challenges to meaningfully follow through with the Geneva process so as to implement resolution 2254 (2015). As instructed by the Secretary-General, I have consulted with a broad spectrum of relevant stakeholders and proactively identified options for a meaningful relaunch of the United Nations-facilitated Geneva process. Over a period of two weeks, I conducted an exhaustive tour of consultations with members of the League of Arab States; representatives of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq; the European Union (EU) High Representative; representatives of several key European countries, Turkey, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran; and all members of the Council, during what I believe was a very productive and useful retreat in Sweden; United States authorities during my visit to meet with them in Washington, D.C., several days ago; and also the Syrian Government and the opposition, with whom I had constructive discussions on the sidelines of the Astana meeting over the past two days. My deputy, Mr. Ramzy, was also in the region this past weekend in continuous political contact with regional stakeholders, and my chief of political affairs, Mr. Robert Dann, is visting China as we speak to exchange views with officials of that important member of the Security Council.

What did I learn from that long tour? Not surprisingly, I returned to Geneva with a mixed picture.

Clearly, significant differences remain, but there is also much common ground and interest on the need, first, to de-escalate, secondly, to form a constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations, thirdly, to facilitate the establishment of a safe, calm and neutral environment — leading to our shared goals in the political process — and, fourthly, to respect Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. However, those commonalities risk getting glossed over, especially in the absence of serious international dialogue. I will say more on that later. During my tour, my message to all was the need — now more than ever — for robust, strong, proactive and urgent dialogue and consensus at the international level to create the minimum conditions necessary for a realistic and credible political process. As we know, much water has flowed under the bridge and much has happened since resolution 2254 (2015) was adopted. We are therefore becoming increasingly realistic and know that we need a credible political process that takes into account the current situation and does not forget resolution 2254 (2015).

As the Secretariat, we are not sitting idle in that regard. We are assessing a number of creative options to update, revive and advance the Geneva-based political process. Let me state for the record that the United Nations remains ever-mobilized and -ready to work on the formation of a constitutional committee in accordance with the final statement of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi. I therefore welcome the intention of the Astana guarantors to actively and regularly engage with the United Nations in Geneva so as to see through a concrete follow-up to the statement since its adoption three and a half months ago.

I was also pleased to see a significant number of Member States reaffirm the primacy of the United Nations-led Geneva process, in general, and the need for a constitutional committee working under United Nations auspices, when I was at the EU-United Nations Brussels conference from 24 to 25 April. Those at the conference nearly unanimously reiterated the message that the only solution to the crisis will be political and that only such a political solution will pave the way for reconstruction efforts. Also in Brussels, we saw the entire United Nations system highlight the increasing needs of millions of Syrians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and neighbouring countries hosting refugees.

Let me also note the important contribution of Syrian civil society in Brussels, in particular during a side event organized by the EU and my own Office. Those present did not shy away from debating with one another constructively and intensively on complex issues, such as transitional justice and sanctions. They all demanded the release of all detainees, abductees and missing persons. They all affirmed that any political solution must protect the right of refugees and IDPs. Despite their differences, Syrians — Syrian civil society — displayed a genuine commitment to dialogue and a spirit of negotiation that I hope can be replicated in the formal negotiations.

In Brussels I also met with a group of Syrian women activists who stressed that not enough has been done to secure the direct participation of Syrian women in the political process. I committed to translating our collective commitment to that inclusion into concrete measures, and I will count on the Council's support to keep that promise. For instance, in future intra-Syrian talks, I will insist that the relevant number of seats be reserved exclusively for Syrian women. When I am criticized, I hope that the Council will support me. I know it will not be popular, but it needs to be done.

Let me briefly touch on an issue that was raised by the civil society in Brussels and by many Syrians elsewhere who have been writing to us, that is, the possible implications of the newly adopted Law No. 10. We are quite aware of the concerns surrounding that law. We, as well as other United Nations partners, are seeking clarifications on the law's goals and repercussions, especially for refugees and IDPs who do not have access to legal documentation.

Let me conclude with two bottom lines.

First, de-escalation is critical between the Syrian and international stakeholders, both regional and global. We hope that the relevant players can re-establish some overarching rules of the road in that regard. We stand ready to facilitate such a discussion, with focused support from the Council and key countries for the good offices of the Secretary-General and myself.

Secondly, we must revive the political process in terms of the constitutional committee, as well as in terms of some initial steps towards the establishment of a safe, calm and neutral environment. We stand ready to facilitate discussions on both. Let me stress that a critical component of either aspect of the political process is active, continuous and positive United

Nations engagement with the Syrian parties. I repeat once again that we stand ready, today as always, to engage with the Syrian Government in Damascus. We will also continue our contacts with the opposition and Syrian civil society.

To unlock and lock those two aspects, careful diplomacy is required more than ever — careful, but proactive diplomacy, including at a high level. Hence, we look with interest to the forthcoming visits to Moscow and meetings of Chancellor Merkel and, later on, President Macron with President Putin, which undoubtedly will not avoid the issue of a political process in Syria. The United Nations believes that there is an urgent need for high-level diplomacy to support de-escalation, avoid any miscalculation and ensure a genuine communication system about a sustainable end to the conflict. With the support of the Secretary-General, we will increase our own efforts to contribute to that endeavour, including by offering further ideas and —if required, which we hope it will be — bridging proposals.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): Since this is my first opportunity to congratulate you upon assuming the presidency, Madam President, I would like to do so at this time. I also thank Staffan for his briefing.

Last week the world witnessed a new and extremely dangerous escalation in Syria. It should not surprise anyone on the Security Council that Iran was responsible. Iranian forces operating from Syrian territory launched a rocket attack against Israeli citizens — citizens of a sovereign State Member of the United Nations. The United States strongly supports Israel's right to act in self-defence. Iran's reckless and provocative acts last week prove what we have been saying: wherever Iran shows up in the Middle East, chaos follows. Last week's rocket attack against Israel is the latest in a pattern of destabilizing behaviour that is a dire threat to the region's stability.

Iran's rocket attack against Israel shows something else too. It puts to bed any myths about why Iran is present in Syria, or what its true objectives might be. The fact is that Iran has installed offensive rocket and missile systems in Syria aimed at Israel. Iran has introduced those threats that were not present in Syria before the conflict; they are now. Iran, together with Hizbullah and other militias, is taking advantage of Syrian territory to establish bases and training camps. They are moving ever closer to Israel. The United States calls on Iran, Hizbullah and their other proxies to take no further provocative steps. If they do, Iran will bear full responsibility for its actions.

It is also important to emphasize that Iran's actions do not serve the interests of the Iranian or the Syrian people. The Syrian people get no say in whether Iran threatens war against Syria's neighbours, but it is they who have to live with the consequences.

All of us on the Security Council have an important choice to make: we can stay quiet and watch as Iran builds up the infrastructure to create another Hizbullah in Syria, or we can speak up and take steps to put real pressure on Iran to stop. For our part, the United States refuses to stay quiet. Russia in particular has a special responsibility here. Its troops are on the ground, sometimes alongside Iran's. Russia must know that Iran's provocative actions do nothing to help resolve the war in Syria. Russia must know that Iran's actions do just the opposite. They only inflame, prolong and widen the conflict.

We heard once again from Staffan today that there has been very little progress on the political track. There has been no progress at all in Geneva, or following Russia's own conferences in Astana and Sochi. Since January, the United Nations was supposed assemble a new constitution drafting committee that would help kick off a new round of talks. The United Nations was supposed to have the ability to choose which people would serve on the committee, and the United Nations was supposed to be empowered to facilitate those talks. Instead, the Al-Assad regime has backtracked, stalled and then refused to cooperate.

At the same time, the Syrian regime escalated its brutal military campaign. It seized eastern Ghouta, at the cost of thousands of lives and tens of thousands displaced. It used chemical weapons in Douma. Just yesterday, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-finding Mission released a report determining that chlorine was used during attacks on 4 February in Saraqib.

As reported by the Fact-finding Mission, the facts of that chemical-weapons attack bear the hallmarks

of similar attacks conducted by the Al-Assad regime. As we have said before, the United States assesses that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons well over 50 times since the start of the civil war. The Al-Assad regime, with Iran's and Russia's full support, is choosing to pursue a military solution instead of a political solution, and that goes against everything we should stand for as the Security Council.

In the aftermath of eastern Ghouta, the need for a real ceasefire could not be more obvious. Already, we see the Al-Assad regime launching new attacks in Idlib and the south-west. As Staffan noted, a Ghouta scenario in Idlib would be six times worse than the horror we saw in recent months in Ghouta. Air strikes in the south-west have tripled in the last month, even though that area is part of a de-escalation zone. Russia is supposed to be a sponsor of that zone. It must urgently meet its commitments to prevent the regime from carrying out attacks and stop Iranian militias from expanding their foothold in the south.

Members of the Security Council — all of us — must push the political process forward. There is Council unity behind that goal. There is a clear blueprint for a political solution in resolution 2254 (2015), which we adopted unanimously. We have to send a clear message to the Al-Assad regime and its backers: the end of the conflict can be reached only via the United Nations-led political process. There must be constitutional reform and free and fair elections under United Nations supervision. If the Al-Assad regime does not comply, we need to be prepared to impose real costs on it for its years of defiance and the devastation it has wrought in Syria. If we take those steps, we can start to change the calculus of the Al-Assad regime and its allies in Syria. We can show them that further conflict is not in their interests and that it is time for them to genuinely commit to a political solution. But as we saw last week, the longer we wait, the greater the risk of confrontation. Now is the time to act to reduce tensions and address Iran's designs in Syria. That is how we can prevent further escalation and even worse suffering. There is no time to waste.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing. We can see that his personal participation in the meeting on Syria in Astana enabled him to make it a substantive one. We appreciated his call for active diplomacy, which Russia has advocated for from the very beginning. We continue to make significant efforts to facilitate a political settlement in Syria despite the undermining effects of the aggressive action by the United States, the United Kingdom and France in April against a number of civilian structures in Syria. I discerned no sympathy about what happened there in the statement by my United States colleague, despite the fact that it was a blatant breach of international law and did absolutely nothing to advance any kind of a settlement. Furthermore, her statement had an odd, confrontational tone that I felt certainly did not correspond to the message that Mr. De Mistura wanted to convey to all of us today, which is that it will be important for diplomacy to function if the peace that the Syrians have awaited for so long is to finally be established on the ground.

Unlike some Security Council member States, which prefer taking unilateral measures to finding ways to solve problems, Russia is focusing on steps to genuinely improve the situation on the ground and advance the prospects for a political settlement. As Mr. De Mistura already noted, the ninth meeting of the participants in the Astana process concluded yesterday in the capital of Kazakhstan, and the guarantors adopted a joint statement. We are grateful to the leadership of Kazakhstan for its steadfast support. The meeting in Astana considered concrete measures for resolving a number of political and humanitarian issues and analysed the situation in the de-escalation zones, which play a key role in maintaining the ceasefire regime, reducing the level of violence and generally stabilizing the situation in Syria. The importance was noted of increasing efforts to help all Syrians and restore normal civilian life and, to that end, of providing fast, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and essential humanitarian and medical assistance, and creating the conditions needed to enable the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes, as well as people's freedom of movement.

A second meeting was held of the working group on the liberation of detainees and hostages to discuss the handover of the bodies of the dead and the search for missing persons, with the participation of experts from the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross The importance of continuing joint efforts with the aim of building trust among the conflicting parties in Syria was emphasized. The Syrian Government declared its willingness to engage with the working group and decided to appoint a special representative on issues related to its work.

In line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), the meeting affirmed its determination to continuing to promote a political settlement by helping to implement the recommendations of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi. The consultations with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the Syrian parties will continue, with a view to establishing the conditions conducive to starting the work of a constitutional committee in Geneva as soon as possible, whose parameters will have to be agreed on by the Syrians themselves. We will get nowhere without their consensus, so there is no point in proposing artificial frameworks for the process, especially if they are based on provisional plans of some kind. Thanks to the Astana process, we have succeeded in generating momentum for a political process based on intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations, although, as we have noted, the triple alliance's aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic has significantly limited the room for manoeuvre in that regard.

Concerted efforts by the guarantor countries are bringing us steadily closer to eliminating the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Jabhat Al-Nusra and other terrorist groups altogether. The recent situation in Syria has continued to be difficult. The guarantor countries' efforts are certainly not being helped by provocative initiatives from external actors, which merely strengthen radical sentiments among groups opposing the legitimate Government and fuel their reluctance to work for negotiated solutions.

In Damascus, the operation to liberate the southern regions and suburbs of the capital from ISIL-affiliated groups continues, but Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham are now fully under the Syrian authorities' control and civilian life there is returning. Russian specialists are helping the Syrian authorities to restore civilian infrastructure. Mines are being cleared, socially significant facilities are being rebuilt and electricity and water services are being restored. In eastern Ghouta, some 65,000 residents previously evacuated from the area have returned to their homes. However, in some other regions where the Syrian Government lacks access, the situation has continued to deteriorate. That is especially true of the Rukban and Al-Tuwaihina refugee camps, as well as the former ISIL capital, Raqqa, where the humanitarian situation is disastrous. Measures must be taken to rectify it without delay. The solution is simple — restore Damascus's sovereignty over those territories as soon as possible.

Government forces and Palestinian volunteers, with aerial and artillery support, have continued to combat fierce resistance from terrorist detachments in the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk. The militias wounded several dozen civilians in mortar strikes on residential areas in the north-east area of the camp. In the past week, the territory held by the illegal armed groups in Yarmouk has been significantly reduced.

The Syrian army's assault on ISIL positions in Deir ez-Zor province has also been ramped up. ISIL's adherents have incurred considerable losses in manpower and equipment and have been driven out of an area of about 1,500 square kilometres. A large-scale operation to eliminate ISIL is being conducted in the eastern part of Syria with the aim of completely defeating the terrorists based in hard-to-reach desert areas, who have been increasing their attacks on Government forces in the Euphrates region and Homs province.

We will continue the difficult work of restoring peace in Syria. Frankly, we are disturbed by some international and regional actors' disrespectful attitude to the issue of Syrian sovereignty, of which we have recently seen alarming manifestations. It is important to understand that this will not help to normalize the situation in Syria or the region as a whole. It fuels the conflict and reduces the prospects for a political settlement. For example, how can we be sure that reckless and illegal actions similar to those that occurred a month ago will not be repeated on some other trumped-up pretext? The reckless conduct of a number of international and regional players who claim to have common sense has considerably slowed progress regarding a settlement of the situation in Syria. If they cannot or will not help us with that, they should at least not interfere.

In conclusion, I would like to touch briefly on the remarks by my American colleague. Basically, more than half of her statement was about Iran, not Syria, and Syria is the item on our agenda today, after all. I would also like to ask the Americans some questions we have about that. Before they blame Russia or Iran, I would like to ask what the reason is for the presence of United States forces in Syria and what their real objective is. The territories under their control have become grey areas where extremists of various stripes and real terrorists roam freely. In particular, what is going on with the several hundred ISIL followers who are being held by forces loyal to the United States under United States oversight in the region beyond the

Euphrates? They are not being investigated, and nor are they being returned to their countries of origin. We are worried that ISIL will re-emerge in those areas when the United States withdraws from them, which it must do sooner or later.

In conclusion, I would like to once again assure the Council of Russia's willingness to support any diplomatic efforts that can bring an end to the miseries of the Syrian people and peace to that long-suffering land.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing. I appreciate his tireless efforts to find a political solution to the conflict.

In recent weeks various members of the international community have made tremendous efforts to restore momentum in the political process. China welcomes the latest round of Astana talks and its joint communiqué, and salutes Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Iran for their efforts. We hope that this dialogue will continue to play a positive role in helping to maintain a ceasefire in Syria and advance the Geneva negotiations.

China has always maintained that a political solution is the only possible option where the issue of Syria is concerned, and that achieving that goal will require efforts on the international, regional and national fronts. First, the international community should continue to give its support to the United Nations, as the main channel for mediation, and to Mr. De Mistura's efforts to relaunch the Geneva negotiations as soon as possible, on a basis of full respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and with a view to helping the conflicting parties to engage in negotiations on political governance, the Constitution, elections and counter-terrorism. The Council should remain united in moving the Syrian political process forward.

Secondly, the countries involved in the region should take the country's long-term interests and stability into consideration and play a constructive role in helping to find a political solution. China notes that there have been attacks on targets inside Syria. We hope that the parties concerned will remain calm, show restraint and work together to maintain regional peace and stability.

Thirdly, both the Syrian Government and the opposition, based on concern for the future of their country and the fundamental interests of their people, should proceed to participate in the Geneva negotiations without preconditions, in accordance with the principle of a dialogue that is Syrian-owned and -led, and on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), with a view to actively engaging in gradual efforts to reach a settlement that is acceptable to all the parties.

For its part, China has been working relentlessly to find a solution. On 13 and 14 May, in the first instance of such an event being held on Syria in China, we hosted an international symposium in Shanghai on the prospects for a political settlement to the Syrian issue. It was attended by Xie Xiaoyan, China's Special Envoy for Syria, a representative of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, and the Special Envoys of the United Kingdom and France for Syria, as well as experts and scholars from many countries. Participants held in-depth discussions on the prospects for a solution, the factors bearing on a political settlement and the role of the international community. Our Special Envoy remains in close contact with the parties concerned in his continuing efforts to help reach a solution. Together with the rest of the international community, China stands ready to continue to play a positive and constructive role in finding a political solution to the issue.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his update, and we were glad to hear some encouraging notes of optimism in his briefing.

Despite the numerous problems on the humanitarian and political fronts in Syria, Kazakhstan believes that it is imperative to continue to promote a settlement of the crisis while implementing resolution 2254 (2015). We are glad that at their meetings held on 14 and 15 May in Astana, the representatives of Syria's Government and opposition, along with those of the guarantor States, unanimously confirmed the importance of continuing the process. Among other issues, they addressed the importance of increasing efforts to ensure compliance with the various agreements reached during the previous eight rounds of the Astana talks. On the other hand, they also agreed that Geneva should remain the main international platform from which to seek and implement a political settlement of the Syrian crisis. It will also be important to continue to support the aims of the Astana talks and further Geneva negotiations, while ultimately merging those important platforms with the aim of achieving positive results.

We thank the Special Envoy for his consultations with various Foreign Ministers at the recent summit of the League of Arab States, as well as with Ms. Federica Mogherini, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. His high-level meetings in Moscow, Tehran, Riyadh and Ankara, as well as his consultations with several European ministers and senior representatives of the United States, are also commendable. We are encouraged by his summary today of his meetings and the outcomes of the Astana process, and we note his hopes for progress and his readiness to increase his own efforts and those of several of the principal stakeholders to revive the political process.

We can all see that de-confliction and the precautionary measures to safeguard protected sites under humanitarian law are working. So far this year, 500 additional sites have been de-conflicted, as the process is known. Their coordinates have been voluntarily submitted through the United Nations, and today the total number of sites stands at 661.

We are hearing a number of continuing questions and concerns about the outlook for Idlib, which should certainly be our top priority, simply because it has such a large population of vulnerable ordinary citizens. We agree with Mr. De Mistura that since Idlib is six times larger than eastern Ghouta, and therefore has six times more civilian residents, it is in an extremely vulnerable position. We cannot afford a war in Idlib and we therefore call on the main stakeholders with an influence on the conflicting parties to hold negotiations at the national and local levels and in the wider region in order to mitigate the potential tensions.

We are impressed by the courageous stance of and the sacrifices made by the United Nations, the Red Crescent, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which are serving under the most challenging circumstances.

To conclude, we also hope that the Brussels Conference, held on 24 and 25 April, will help to generate conditions conducive to the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis.

Finally, we emphasize once again that the most important condition for the settlement of the Syrian crisis is a political process, through direct dialogue and the use of confidence-building measures among the parties, without which there can be no lasting results. We should not forget that it is the Syrians themselves who should begin to shape the future political system of the Syrian State, with the necessary legislative reforms, its territorial and administrative structure, and presidential and parliamentary elections, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our gratitude for the briefing that we heard from Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to whom we reiterate our support in the discharge of his duties.

Once again we cannot but express our sorrow at the fact that this conflict has gone on for six years now and we are still witnessing the ongoing siege and violence suffered by the Syrian people, mainly children, who, in addition to living with the psychological aftermath of the situation, are also in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. We deplore any act of violence that puts human lives at risk and therefore call for an end to the violence and urge the parties to refrain from any hostile, provocative or unilateral actions, in order to prevent any further suffering of the Syrian people and any further destabilization of the region.

We welcome the holding of the summit of the three ceasefire guarantors in Ankara, Turkey, in March. We will be focusing closely on the next summit, which will be sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Likewise, we welcome the recent Astana meeting. We deem its outcome positive, as were the agreements reached one year ago exactly, when the important de-escalation zones were established. We believe that that international initiative has served to reduce the level of violence and has facilitated, and will continue to facilitate, the path to peace and stability in Syria.

We therefore call for greater coordination among the local authorities within the de-escalation zones, humanitarian agencies and the Syrian Government, which will make it possible to improve the living conditions of the local population, with a view to contributing to international efforts to end the conflict in Syria.

We call once again for efforts to continue with respect to the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), so as to ensure safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access to all those who require it. The protection of the civilian population and civilian infrastructure must also be a priority within the

framework of respect for international law and international humanitarian law.

We deem imperative the voluntary return of internally displaced persons in a safe and dignified manner, as soon as the situation permits. For that to happen, demining will be vital in those areas where it is necessary. We would urge that the political dialogue agenda continue to focus on the release of detainees and abductees, as well as on the identification of missing or deceased persons.

We stress the efforts made towards the voluntary return of thousands of people to eastern Ghouta and other cities north and south of Damascus and their subsequent full return. My delegation would draw the attention of the Security Council to the need to protect thousands of innocent civilians, including children and the elderly, and move them to Idlib. It is urgent and pressing that peace be maintained and any escalation of violence avoided in that area, as the aftermath could be tragic.

We believe that measures must continue to be taken to reduce the level of violence on the ground, promote confidence among the parties involved, alleviate the humanitarian situation and promote ongoing initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful political solution. The process must take place on the basis of the various initiatives taken and meetings held at different levels. We therefore underscore once again the commitments made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi on 30 January, with a focus on strengthening the United Nations-led political process in the framework of the road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015), in particular through the drafting of a new constitution and the establishment of a constitutional committee, which we believe must be representative and impartial. We hope that the work of that committee, in Geneva, should start as soon as possible and should be active and dynamic and include the participation of all parties to the conflict.

We welcome the good offices and mediation of the Secretary-General and his close collaboration with the members of the Security Council in the quest for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria.

To conclude, we reject any attempt to divide or fragment Syria along ethnic lines or to foster sectarianism there. It is the Syrian people themselves who must freely decide their future and their political leadership, in the framework of their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, without any external pressure or interference.

We reiterate that the only way to resolve the conflict in Syria is through a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process that is inclusive and based on consultation and dialogue and that will allow for a peaceful solution to be reached among all the parties involved.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I had not intended to speak today in the Chamber, but I wanted to respond to some of the things that we have just heard. I will therefore take this opportunity to thank Staffan de Mistura and his team for all their work, which is not proving as fast or as productive as all of us would like, but I think that we are very grateful to Staffan for all his efforts. I was also interested to hear the Chinese account of the work of their envoy.

We all know what needs to be done. We have had very many discussions in this Chamber and in the Consultations Room about Syria. I think that what we struggle with is how to get it done and how to take the next step, so I hope that when we leave the Chamber and go next door into closed consultations, we can actually have a proper discussion, without polemics, about what it will take to get the constitutional committee up and running; what are the concrete steps that need to be taken and how we as the Council can best facilitate and support that; and what it takes to get Idlib protected. Lots of speakers today have referred to Idlib; I think that we all know its importance, scale and significance. I would urge those Astana progenitors to do what they can to ensure that on the ground, people in Idlib are safe and that we avert a humanitarian catastrophe there. But I would like to have a proper discussion next door about how the Council can actually support that.

I wanted to turn to the issue of the Syrian Government engaging with the United Nations. The Russian representative referred to backsliding from a political settlement and entrenching Syrian unwillingness for a negotiated solution. I think that those two statements are very damning, but they are not damning about us; they are damning about the Syrian regime. We really need all those with influence on Syria, including Russia and Iran, to encourage it to set aside a military strategy as a way to resolve the conflict and to engage with the United Nations across the board, so that we can get back to Geneva and to a political settlement. It is not we in the West who are stopping

that happening. The onus is truly on Syria to follow the will of the Security Council and its resolutions and to allow the United Nations to do its work to help the people of Syria. Those are the main things I wanted to say, but I would like to touch on three more points as well, if I may.

We support what the Special Envoy said about bringing women in, which I think is long overdue, and he can count on the United Kingdom's full support for that. I would also like to refer to Iran and the strikes on Israel from Syrian territory, on which we are in full agreement with the United States representative's comments and have been very vocal about in public. I also want to comment on the Russian representative's remarks about the air strikes. I will not rehearse why France, the United States and the United Kingdom took the action we did, except to say that we did it to avert a humanitarian catastrophe, and in doing so we helped to protect civilians on the ground, deterred and degraded Syria's ability to use chemical weapons and thereby upheld the global prohibition on weapons of mass destruction.

While I think those things remain very important, they should not be used by anyone on the Council as a reason to let the Syrian Government off the hook where engaging with the United Nations on the political process is concerned. The political process has been essential since 2012, when the Geneva talks were started. It has been increasingly essential since then, and it continues to be essential now. I therefore hope that when we go next door we can have a very detailed discussion about how we as the Council can get back to the spirit of Sweden and actually help Staffan de Mistura and his team do something concrete to achieve that, and have no more mud-slinging.

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): To begin with, the delegations of the United States and the United Kingdom have tried to promote false claims justifying their aggression against sovereign States, particularly my country, Syria, with the aim of concealing their direct involvement in terrorism and their part in the responsibility for the bloodshed in Syria. I would like to say to them that the testimony, as cited in the media, of the thousands of Syrians who have escaped the blockades of armed terrorist groups in eastern Ghouta, has proved that those countries have been involved in making those citizens suffer through their support of those terrorist groups. Through their positions, their malicious acts and their illegal occupation of various areas of Syria, they have shown that, contrary to their claims, they cannot let go of their history of greed, occupation and imperialism. When speaking in the Council, they claim falsely that they are trying to find a political solution to the situation in Syria, but let me point out, briefly, that we have been able to defeat their agenda in Aleppo and eastern Ghouta, and we will be able to ensure that they cannot win in any part of my country.

For the past seven years, since the beginning of the terrorist war in Syria, the United States, Britain and France have been working relentlessly to support and help conduct that war. They have also used the United Nations as a political tool to put pressure on the Syrian Government to implement their hegemonic agenda, interfere in our internal affairs and destabilize my country. They have not used the United Nations to fight terrorism and its sponsors or to help Syria overcome the suffering inflicted on it by armed terrorist groups, which should have been the goal.

The Special Envoy devoted part of his statement to discussing the humanitarian situation. In that regard, I want to reiterate that the Syrian Government gives priority to providing every kind of humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need, wherever they are in Syria. That is our duty, and we are doing our duty. The legal and constitutional obligations established under international decisions and Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism obliged my Government to undertake military operations in eastern Ghouta in order to rescue civilians from the armed terrorist groups holding them hostage and using them for years as human shields. In that regard, I want to state that contrary to some false narratives, the successful military operations conducted by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies against the armed terrorist groups controlling a number of areas that the United Nations has classified as besieged or hard to reach — along with the settlement and reconciliation agreements — have all mitigated civilians' suffering, reduced the numbers of those areas and facilitated humanitarian access to them, including eastern Ghouta.

We deplore the fact that the United States speaks of its eagerness to reach a political agreement while it has been committing acts of aggression against my country based on lies, simply because it is working to give support to the armed groups because they have suffered losses in eastern Ghouta. It was the United States that supported Israel's aggression on 9 May when Israel was unable to protect its own proxy terrorist groups and implement its conspiracy against my country's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Israel has continued its dangerous acts of aggression, which would not have been possible without the continuing unstinting support of the United States Government, because it enjoys impunity as a result of the support it has from the United States in the Security Council, enabling Israel to continue its terrorist acts threatening international peace and security in the region and the world. The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that through its military and armed forces it is able and ready to fend off all acts of aggression against its sovereignty and independence. However, we want to reiterate that any attempts to support this failing terrorism will not work. Such flagrant violations will not present obstacles to us in combating terrorism throughout Syrian territory.

Yesterday we concluded round nine of the Astana process, and we are pleased with the results. We thank the delegations of Russia, Iran and the host country, Kazakhstan, for making the Astana process a success with regard to combating terrorism. The outcome document of the meeting stresses the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic against any external entities that attempt to violate them.

In cooperation with our friends and allies, the Syrian army has succeeded in liberating eastern Ghouta and the southern area of Damascus, making the capital and its surrounding areas safe. With the cooperation of our friends and brothers, we have also expelled the terrorists from the northern area of Homs and the southern area of Hama. Today we reaffirm that we will continue to fight terrorism and to work to liberate each and every part of our territory from terrorism and from countries that seek to undermine our sovereignty.

In conclusion, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic will spare no effort to support all genuine efforts to arrive at a political solution whereby Syrians, and only Syrians, will decide their future and make choices aimed at safeguarding Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

The President: The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I just wanted to comment on the Syrian representative's last statement, in which he said that the Syrian Arab Republic will spare no effort to arrive at a political solution. That is obviously a welcome statement. I would like to ask him if he could tell the Council, or is willing to say today, that Syria will put the same amount of effort into engaging with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and with the Council in order to take concrete steps to get the Geneva process to work and to get a constitutional committee off the ground. If Syria were able to make that commitment today in the Chamber, I believe that would unlock a lot of things for the Council.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have said time and again that we are working with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. A delegation from the Syrian Arab Republic is working directly with him. We are eager, as we have said repeatedly, to find a peaceful, Syrian-led solution to the Syrian crisis.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8261

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8261st meeting
Wednesday, 16 May 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Lewicki/Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Vaverka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

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18-15030 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisionalrules of procedure, I invite the representative of Guinea-Bissau to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and His Excellency Mr. Mauro Vieira, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Mr. Fedotov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: I am grateful for this opportunity to provide an oral update on the politica' and security situations in Guinea-Bissau and on the country's preparations for elections.

Since the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), on 28 February, encouraging progress has been made in the efforts to break the political and institutional deadlock that has persisted in Guinea-Bissau for almost three years. As the Security Council is aware, during the extraordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 14 April, President José Mário Vaz of Guinea-Bissau made several key commitments, which have since been fulfilled. Those include the swearing-in of Mr. Aristides Gomes as the consensual Prime Minister, on 16 April, the issuance of a decree on the same day that confirms 18 November as the date for the legislative elections, and the convening of the plenary session of the National Assembly on 19 April, for the first time in more than two years. At its meeting, the Assembly approved the appointment of the President and the Executive Secretariat of the National Electoral Commission and extended the term of the legislature until November.

Since then, with the facilitation of an ECOWAS ministerial delegation, which visited Bissau on 24 April, a new inclusive Government has been sworn in. The new Cabinet, which will be in office until the legislative elections in November, comprises 26 ministers, four of whom are women.

The significant breakthrough was achieved following an agreement reached between the two main political parties, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and the Party for Social Renewal, with the facilitation of the Catholic Bishop of Bissau. It also owes much to the consistent pressure put by ECOWAS on Bissau-Guinean political stakeholders, which culminated in the imposition of targeted sanctions on individuals deemed to be obstructing efforts to end the impasse, as well as the encouragement and facilitation of United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and the other members of the group of five international partners in Bissau, namely, ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). Those encouraging developments pave the way for launching the electoral process and creating openings for other peacebuilding initiatives that have been long stalled because of the impasse.

Nonetheless, several key provisions of the ECOWAS-brokered Conakry Agreement of October 2016 have yet to be implemented. As a crucial next step, the political stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau have initiated discussions that will culminate in the holding of a national round-table dialogue, as provided for in the Conakry Agreement. Both the Government programme and a stability pact, which outline the principles for key reforms until the end of the current term of the legislature, are expected to be endorsed by the political stakeholders following the national round-table dialogue. The primary focus of the first meeting of the new Council of Ministers, on 10 May, was on preparations for the elections. UNIOGBIS will continue efforts, including within the framework of the Guinea-Bissau group of five international partners, to encourage the Government to move forward the convening of the round table and, more broadly, the implementation of the remaining priorities outlined in the Conakry Agreement.

With respect to the legislative elections, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project document on electoral support to the Government, in the amount of $7.7 million, has been finalized. The project will support technical preparations for cartography activities, an update of the voter register, voter education and electoral administration. The Government of Guinea-Bissau has made an unprecedented contribution of $1.8 million to the UNDP basket fund. UNDP has also contributed $200,000 to the fund, which, among other priorities, will allow the UNDP to procure biometric equipment for the electoral technical wing of the Ministry of the Interior. The tender and procurement process for the purchase of the biometric equipment and software will be launched on 21 May, and the National Electoral Commission, which supervises the process, is expected to begin voter registration on 1 June.

Additional resources are urgently needed to fill a funding gap of approximately $5.7 million to cover voter registration and operational costs for the elections. In order to avoid yet another delay in the elections, it will be important for the international community to provide the requisite support to bridge the funding gap.

However, we remain concerned about the drug-trafficking situation and associated forms of transnational organized crime. Since the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), there have been at least five reported seizures of drugs at the international airport in Bissau, which many fear might be just the tip of the iceberg. It is our hope that ongoing efforts to enhance UNIOGBIS monitoring and reporting capabilities, in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other partners, will, in due course, expose the true extent of the problem and contribute to combating impunity.

Also since the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), steps have been taken by UNIOGBIS, with the support of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, to reorient the resources and interventions of the mission towards the effective implementation of the new priorities articulated by the Security Council. To that end, a DPA-led technical assessment mission — comprised of the relevant United Nations departments and offices — was sent to Bissau for the period from 24 to 31 March. The team met with national, regional and international stakeholders, and worked closely with UNIOGBIS to help realign the mission's resources, and internal work on the reorientation is well under way. It was agreed that resources would be temporarily redeployed from the former rule-of-law and security institutions component to support the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in conducting good offices and providing support for the elections, as well as for the newly established component on drug trafficking and organized crime. UNODC will be integrated into that component.

In addition, future United Nations police deployments are expected to focus on criminal detection and investigation, and the promotion of human rights and gender equality will be mainstreamed in all mission activities. The report and recommendations of the technical assessment mission to Bissau will also inform the strategic review mission, which will take place in late August or early September. The strategic review will encompass the Secretary- General's assessment of UNIOGBIS, including options for a possible reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in the country and a reprioritization of tasks, as requested by the Council in resolution 2404 (2018).

The latest successful efforts to assist Bissau-Guinean stakeholders to end the political and institutional impasse and launch the country on the path of sustainable peace and development provide cause for optimism. The period leading up to the legislative elections, and particularly leading up to the next presidential elections, in 2019, will be critical and fraught with uncertainties.

Before concluding, I would like to recognize the commendable contribution of Mr. Modibo Touré, who completed his assignment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on 6 May, particularly his laudable efforts in forging close and constructive relations with ECOWAS and the region. I would also like to welcome his successor, Mr. José Viegas Filho, who will assume his responsibilities later this month and continue to build on progress made in Guinea-Bissau. I would also like to express our appreciation to our partners — ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union and the CPLP for their contributions, cooperation and efforts, which have helped open the way for a better future for Guinea Bissau — an opportunity that the people of Guinea-Bissau should be encouraged, assisted and influenced to grasp.

The President: I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov: I would like to thank the Security Council for its continued attention to the threats posed by drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime to peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau.

As the Council recognized in resolution 2404 (2018), the Government of Guinea-Bissau, the Economic Community of West African States, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other partners are working together to address those urgent challenges. That includes support to the transnational crime unit established under the West Africa Coast Initiative, the joint airport interdiction task force under the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP) and the trafficking in persons brigade of the judicial police. Since its establishment, the transnational crimes unit has investigated 70 cases of drug trafficking, with 113 persons prosecuted and 71 kilogrammes of cocaine and 1,353 kilogrammes of cannabis seized. Thanks to mentoring under UNODC's AIRCOP at Bissau airport, five passengers attempting to smuggle cocaine were arrested in April. Those are just two examples of the positive impact that capacity-building can have as part of integrated support to strengthen criminal justice responses and promote peace and security. UNODC has developed a technical assistance package for Guinea-Bissau, with clearly identifies areas of intervention.

First, we need to do more to build capacities. We will continue supporting the judicial police and nationally owned inter-service elite units that have been established and proven to be successful, namely, the transnational crime unit and the joint airport interdiction task force. That support for detection and investigative skills should encompass intelligence-gathering and analysis, profiling techniques and the sharing of operational information at national, regional and international levels.

Secondly, we need to help counter-illicit financial flows. UNODC is ready to respond to the request received from Guinea-Bissau's financial intelligence unit to provide technical assistance to fight money laundering and prevent and counter illicit financial flows.

Thirdly, we need to strengthen law enforcement responses to maritime crime. The Bijagós archipelago of 88 islands further exposes Guinea-Bissau to criminal activities due to the difficulties of controlling vast territorial waters.

Transnational organized crime, coupled with a challenging political and security environment, law enforcement capacity gaps and resource constraints, represents a clear threat to Guinea-Bissau, the region and beyond. Combating drug trafficking and dismantling criminal networks clearly requires specialized assistance, and it also requires funds. Despite our intense efforts to mobilize resources, funding for UNODC activities in Guinea-Bissau was drastically reduced in 2017. Our Office must rely solely on project funding, even to carry out urgently needed technical assistance. However, donors remain reluctant to engage in Guinea-Bissau in view of the current political situation.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to urge the international community to enable UNODC and other international agencies to provide the comprehensive support Guinea-Bissau needs to address drug and crime threats, in line with resolution 2404 (2018), to help re-establish momentum towards progress. UNODC remains at the Council's disposal.

The President: I thank Mr. Fedotov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Vieira.

Mr. Vieira: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the invitation to address the Security Council in my capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Before starting, I would also like to welcome the appointment of Mr. José Viegas Filho of Brazil as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau. Mr. Viegas has more than four decades of experience in public service and diplomacy, and the PBC looks forward to closely working with him. I would also like to thank the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Modibo Touré, for his close collaboration with the PBC and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) during his tenure in Guinea-Bissau.

Since my previous briefing to the Security Council, on 14 February (see S/PV.8182), there have been positive developments in Guinea-Bissau. I will not dwell long on those points, especially after the excellent briefing we received today from the Assistant Secretary-General

for Political Affairs, Mr. Taye-Brook Zerihoun. As we have heard, President José Mário Vaz appointed Aristides Gomes as the new consensual Prime Minister and confirmed that legislative elections would be held on 18 November. Members of the new Government were sworn in on 26 April.

After almost three years of political impasse, an extraordinary plenary session of the Parliament was convened on 19 April, when the National People's Assembly elected new leadership for the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and extended its ninth legislature until November. The appointment of a new Chair of the NEC is indeed an important step, since that was a factor blocking the preparations for the upcoming elections in November. As I informed the Council during my statement in February, that was stressed by many of my interlocutors in Guinea-Bissau last July, when I visited the country.

Let me also add that, on 3 May, the Chair of the organizing committee of the National Conference for Guinea-Bissau on Peace Consolidation and Development, Father Domingos da Fonseca, delivered a report to President José Mario Vaz entitled "In the name of peace". That document was drafted after a long process of national consultations involving more than 3,000 people in the Guinean diaspora and in the country. The paper examines a series of issues related to peacebuilding and aims to contribute to national reconciliation. Preparations for that report began in 2009, and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) provided support to it.

With regard to the PBF, it is worth mentioning that the implementation of its new portfolio for Guinea-Bissau started this year. As I mentioned during my previous briefing, it consists of six projects, totalling $7.3 million, running from January 2018 to June 2019. It aims to contribute through bottom-up peacebuilding approaches, supporting inclusive processes and strengthening the participation of women and youth.

On Monday, 14 May, I convened a meeting of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the PBC to discuss the situation in the country. On that occasion, we received briefings from Mr. David McLachlan-Karr, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau; Mr. Tanou Koné, Permanent Observer of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba, Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea and Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012), concerning Guinea-Bissau; Ambassador Fernando Delfim da Silva of Guinea-Bissau, and Ms. Barrie Freeman, who updated us on the most recent work of the PBSO.

During that very positive meeting, participants expressed support for developments in the country, including the fact that the constitutional framework for free and fair elections would be respected. Members also underlined the engagement of ECOWAS and recognized the effective, preventive and deterrent role of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau, as well as the importance of ensuring its continuity until the necessary conditions for its withdrawal were fully met, at least until the 2019 presidential elections. The PBC therefore would like to congratulate the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the political actors for the constructive spirit that allowed for the consensus appointment of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes and his Cabinet and the establishment of a date for the legislative elections this year.

I would like to stress, however, the importance of continued support for that positive momentum and to underline the need to move forward on other provisions of the Conakry Agreement, including the adoption of a stability pact. I am sure that the authorities of Guinea-Bissau and key political actors will continue to demonstrate leadership and determination in that direction.

I would also like to recognize the efforts of the region to solve the political impasse in the country. That was made possible due to an exemplary showing of international coordination, which includes the group of five international organizations involved in the peacebuilding process in Guinea-Bissau, that is, ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). The PBC actively participated in these efforts.

All of what I have mentioned speaks to the sustaining peace approach in peacebuilding and the importance of ensuring the coherence of international efforts in support of building and sustaining peace in a country-specific context, with a strong emphasis on inclusiveness and partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, as well as other relevant stakeholders, including civil society. This is also where the added value of the PBC comes into play.

With regard to the electoral process, important challenges ahead include, inter alia, the financing of the elections and the update of the voter registration list. The existing financial challenges must be surmounted in order to allow for the timely preparations for the elections. A project document in support of the elections has been signed between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Guinea-Bissau. The total budget of $7.7 million covers technical preparations for mapping, an update of voter registrations and the practical administration of the elections. It is important to underline that the Government of Guinea-Bissau has already made an unprecedented contribution to this basket fund. UNDP has also made contributions. In addition to the ongoing technical assistance the European Union is providing to the Technical Office for Electoral Processes Support, it is also preparing its contribution to the elections support project. However, additional financial resources are still needed. I would therefore once again like to call for the support of the international community for bridging the existing financial gap associated with the process.

I would also like to reiterate to the Council my intention to visit Guinea-Bissau in the coming months, probably in July, to consult with a broad range of stakeholders on how the PBC can further support peacebuilding efforts in the country, especially the upcoming elections. The exact date of the visit will be scheduled in consultations with the local authorities. The visit will allow me to witness at first hand the ongoing preparations for the legislative elections. On my return, I intend to convene a PBC meeting to discuss the process. I would also like to reiterate my disposition to share the findings with the members of the Security Council.

The Guinea-Bissau configuration will continue to be actively engaged in following the situation in Guinea-Bissau and in providing support for the country through different initiatives. All efforts must be made to encourage the international community to demonstrate renewed confidence in Guinea-Bissau now that the political impasse has been addressed.

Finally, I would like to remind the Security Council that Brazil is currently the Chair of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries. As was done when I previously briefed the Council, the members of the CPLP have endorsed my remarks and recommendations.

The President: I thank Mr. Vieira for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Djédjé (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for their excellent briefings. I would also like to welcome the participation in this meeting of Mr. Mauro Vieira, Permanent Representative of Brazil and Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. José Viegas Filho on his appointment as Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), as well as to pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Modibo Touré, for his outstanding work as head of the Office.

Since the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), on 28 February 2018, on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, encouraging information from the country marks a real break with the previous situation, which was characterized in particular by an institutional and political deadlock. Indeed, on the basis of frank dialogue and quiet consultations, political actors in Guinea-Bissau, including President José Mário Vaz, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and the Party for Social Renewal, seem resolutely committed to work together to lead their country on the road to lasting peace.

At this point, I would like to congratulate all stakeholders, including civil society and religious leaders, and encourage them to continue those efforts, with a view to a better future for Guinea-Bissau. In that regard, the appointment of a consensus Prime Minister, Mr. Aristides Gomes, the setting of the date for the parliamentary elections, on 18 November 2018, the reopening and functioning of the Parliament, as well as the formation of an inclusive Government, on 25 April 2018, are proof of this new impetus, which is certainly fragile, but which brings hope. These various acts, which lay the foundations for a peaceful end to the crisis, are the result of the progress made in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016, which remains the only consensual framework that should make it possible to find a lasting solution to the situation in Guinea-Bissau.

However, despite theose positive signs, the enormous challenges ahead require the continued support and assistance of the international community, in order to overcome the obstacles to a definitive peace in Guinea-Bissau. These are the next stages of the Conakry Agreement, namely, the organization of a round table for national dialogue, the signing of a stability pact and the preparations for parliamentary elections. In that regard, the clear priority objectives assigned to UNIOGBIS by resolution 2404 (2018), particularly with regard to elections, should be taken into account. My country would therefore like to appeal to donors and the international community to create the technical conditions necessary for the organization of open, fair and credible legislative elections. In addition, cooperation between UNIOGBIS and regional organizations, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and international partners, should continue to help stabilize the country.

One of the major challenges facing Guinea-Bissau relates to security issues, both within the country and at its borders. Meeting this challenge requires the updating of relevant legislation and national mechanisms to combat transnational organized crime more effectively, including drug trafficking and money-laundering, which threaten the security and stability of Guinea-Bissau and the subregion. With this in mind, the Security Council, through its resolution 2404 (2018), encourages greater involvement by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in order to vigorously combat these scourges.

In that regard, my country would like to recall, particularly in the framework of UNODC-ECOWAS cooperation, the existence of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for West Africa for the period 2016-2020, the implementation of which aims to contribute, inter alia, to the reduction of drug addiction, drug trafficking and crime in the subregion. It is important to bear in mind that poor management of the security issue could have a negative impact on the ongoing political process.

In that perspective, we believe it is essential to provide UNODC with the necessary means to fulfil its mission, in order to contribute to a successful way out of the crisis. Ultimately, only the ownership by Guinea-Bissau's political stakeholders of their own destiny and the continued support of international partners will enable Guinea-Bissau to recover peace, a guarantee of its economic and social development.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the convening of today's briefing and thanks Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General, for the very important information he has provided. We also thank Ambassador Mauro Vieira for his significant and strenuous efforts to carry out the duties entrusted to him last year. We welcome the appointment of Mr. José Viegas Filho as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). We would also like to again congratulate former Special Representative Mr. Modibo Touré on his initiatives and constant cooperation with the Security Council during his two-year tenure.

After nearly three years of a political and institutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau, the Security Council and the international community have a reason to be optimistic. Recent positive developments in the country provide a logical explanation for the encouraging environment. On 16 April, President José Mário Vaz conveyed hope to his people, the friends of Guinea-Bissau and the international community by appointing Mr. Aristide Gomes as consensus Prime Minister. The appointment of Mr. Gomes to that important State post was the result of long negotiations supported primarily by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, which enabled the main political parties to reach a firm consensus. A few days later, UNIOGBIS endorsed the overwhelming approval of civil society and of the people in general with regard to the appointment of such an experienced politician.

With regard to the recently formed inclusive Government, although it is indeed true that the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde and the Party for Social Renewal control the majority of Government portfolios, the real surprise in the Government's composition is the fact that the leaders of three other parties — the President of the Union for Change, the President of the Democratic Convergence Party and the President of the New Democracy Party — were allocated seats in Parliament, which demonstrates the Government's inclusive nature. The main goal of the new Government team, which should achieve tangible results in a relatively short time, is to guarantee smooth, transparent and inclusive legislative elections on 18 November. To that end, it is vital that the necessary $7.7 million be made available to the

electoral fund as soon as possible. The Government and the United Nations Development Programme agreed to that fund to be able to proceed with the electoral census update and to establish a new mapping division so that the Government and the new management team of the National Electoral Commission can have the technical means to hold successful elections in a peaceful and calm environment.

Peacebuilding and the consolidation of political and institutional progress require much more than organizing elections. The Conakry Agreement also demands other kinds of conclusive reforms, such as a review of the Constitution, the signing of a stability pact, electoral law reform, political party law reform, including public financing, and defence, security and justice sector reform and the drafting of the fresh start development plan according to the Terra Ranca vision. Prospects for development are vital to enable the country to return to the path of economic development. We acknowledge and are grateful for the donations already being made, and we congratulate the Government of Guinea-Bissau for making an initial contribution of $1.8 million. We call upon donors, the main international financial institutions and Guinea-Bissau's traditional and non-traditional donors to make their contributions in order to move the process forward.

It is important that such development occurs within the context of regional development. As expressed by the African Union Commission in its communiqué of 2 May, we would like to encourage the new authorities and all interested parties in Guinea-Bissau to work closely within the framework of the country's democratic institutions and take urgent and sustainable steps to address current challenges as soon as possible in order to ensure lasting stability in the country. The examples of Liberia and Sierra Leone clearly demonstrate that, with effort, political will, solidarity, coordination and international assistance, a peaceful and lasting solution can be found to the situation in Guinea-Bissau.

In conclusion, we congratulate and pay tribute to regional institutions — the ECOWAS and the African Union — on the tremendous efforts and considerable progress they have made to resolve the political and institutional impasse. It is also important to acknowledge the involvement and efforts of the European Union, the United Nations and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries. It is essential that group of international actors remain committed to providing assistance to Guinea-Bissau in the post-election period and helping it to develop a budget to achieve its economic goals. I would like especially to thank and congratulate Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, for his support to the Government of Guinea-Bissau to curb drug trafficking.

In our capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012), concerning Guinea-Bissau, we are considering a trip to the country at the end of June to begin to take stock of the progress made and of the status of the current sanctions imposed on military leaders who carried out the coup d'état on 12 April 2012.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): May I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Ambassador Vieira for their briefings. Although he has left us because of technical difficulties, I would also like to thank the Executive Director Fedotov for his briefing. It was important to hear from him given the specific threat of organized crime in Guinea-Bissau.

Like others who have spoken so far, the United Kingdom welcomes the recent progress seen in Guinea-Bissau. That progress has been considerable. A consensus Prime Minister after some months of difficulty, a date for legislative elections and the formation of an inclusive Government are all signs that good sense and consideration for Guinea-Bissau's stability have trumped narrow political interests. However, I think that we must all witness continued progress before we are convinced that the current reality is really a new reality. We need Guinea-Bissau's leaders to stick to their political agreement. It is an agreement for their country's future and for their people's future, and it must not be held hostage to personal disputes.

We need unity behind preparations for elections, which are now only six months away. We also need unified steps towards political and constitutional reform in line with the concrete commitments made in Conakry. We have already seen how civil society, whether religious leaders or women mediators, have acted in the country's long-term interests. We would urge Guinea-Bissau's leaders to create opportunities for their meaningful participation in the political processes. We in the Council know that inclusive political settlements are those that last.

It is clear we would not be discussing progress in Guinea-Bissau without the patient leadership shown by the Economic Community of West African

States (ECOWAS). We urge ECOWAS to continue its engagement to see the political crisis through and, in return, we in the Council must remain united in our support for ECOWAS and all of the impressive things it has been doing.

In February, the Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), with a narrower focus on good offices. While the situation on the ground has changed, the mandate remains just as, if not more, relevant. In the short term, the priorities must be consolidating the political settlement and delivering the elections. Continued good-offices support will be required in the medium term to see through political reforms. We also welcome the deepening focus on transnational organized crime and illicit drugs, which are security threats not only for the country but for the region and the international community at large.

We welcome warmly Ambassador Vieira's briefing and agree with him on the importance of the sustaining peace approach. Given a changed political environment on the ground and a refreshed mandate, the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. José Viegas Filho, is timely and welcome. He has an opportunity to bring renewed direction and drive to refocusing and slimming down UNIOGBIS as per the February mandate and delivering on the priority tasks at hand.

But let me in the same vein offer the sincere thanks of the United Kingdom to former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Modibo Touré. Despite the obstacles that UNIOGBIS has faced, he demonstrated genuine commitment to Guinea-Bissau through to the end of his term and helped deliver the positive progress that we are discussing today.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I, too, would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun and Ambassador Vieira for their briefings today, and, although Executive Director Fedotov has left us, we want to express appreciation for the renewed vigour that he has to counter narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime in Guinea-Bissau. I also join others in welcoming the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Filho, as he acquaints himself with his new portfolio. We very much look forward to working with him and wish to express appreciation to his predecessor, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Modibo Touré, for his service and passion to bring about positive change in the lives of the people of Guinea-Bissau.

The United States is encouraged by the consensus appointment and swearing in of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes as well as President Vaz's renewed commitment to implementing the Conakry Agreement. While we are hopeful that these latest political developments signal a positive turn for Guinea-Bissau, past experience reminds us to remain cautious. Vigilance is still needed from all stakeholders to ensure fulfilment of the commitments made by the country's leadership. The people of Guinea-Bissau deserve as much, and the Council demands as much. We urge President Vaz, Prime Minister Gomes, African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde leader Pereira and others to follow through on fostering unity, implementing the Conakry Agreement and preparing the nation for the long-overdue parliamentary elections this November.

Following the swift installation of an inclusive Government, we call on its members to focus on creating a programme of work and achieving service delivery to show that they are serious about serving the people who put them in power. In all these endeavours, we encourage the inclusion of civil-society and women's groups. We applaud the influential engagement of the Women's Forum for Peace and the national women's council and look forward to the national forum of women and girls for peace, scheduled in Bissau for later this month.

As Guinea-Bissau finally sets out towards newly scheduled November legislative elections, we look forward to a free, fair and transparent poll. We encourage all of Guinea-Bissau's partners in the region and the international community to find ways to support the Government's efforts to prepare for and execute the elections, including through financial support.

Narcotics trafficking and transnational organized crime destroy lives at all ends of the geographic spectrum. We genuinely appreciate the work that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has done in Guinea-Bissau, work that we perceive as having had a positive impact, reducing drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The establishment of the Transnational Crime Unit in Bissau, under the auspices of the West Africa Coast Initiative, served as a powerful tool integrating efforts across the region to combat trafficking.

We were glad to learn that the 20 suspended members of the Unit had been reinstated and were heartened by the recent string of drug seizures at Bissau airport in April. We hope to see more such concrete results, with full investigations and accountability supported by the Government and the security services, no matter where the trail leads. However, in order to continue to see impact, we wish to see the return of UNODC staff to Bissau. We will work with our Council colleagues, the Secretariat and UNODC to find a way to make that happen.

We once again salute the activism of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including its February imposition of sanctions on spoilers of the Conakry Agreement and all its forward-leaning efforts to foster enduring solutions to Guinea-Bissau's crisis and the implementation of the remaining provisions of the Conakry Agreement.

As I stated in February (see S/PV.8194), we believe that the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), renewing the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), will bring real improvement to the mission, allowing it to focus on putting an end to the stalemate. Only two months later, we have seen a concrete political process, and we expect to see a mission focused on political solutions and employing its good offices working in concert with ECOWAS. We appreciate the continued implementation of resolution 2404 (2018) as it was adopted in determining the mission's mandated tasks, size and budget.

We are also encouraged by the positive events of the last month but acknowledge that Guinea-Bissau has a long road left to travel. Its people will encounter many challenges on that road, but obstructionist, intransigent and selfish leaders should not be one of them. Leaders have now shown willingness to take some steps in seemingly good faith. We will anxiously track their progress in the weeks and months to come as they implement the Conakry Agreement, foster unity, deliver services to the people of Guinea-Bissau, fight corruption and transnational organized crime, and prepare the nation for elections in November.

Mr. Vaverka (Sweden): I join others in thanking Assistant-Secretary-General Zerihoun and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Executive Director Fedotov for their useful briefings today. I would also like to thank Ambassador Mauro Vieira, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for his important contribution to today's discussion.

Since we last met in this Chamber to discuss Guinea-Bissau, there have been a number of positive developments. We welcome the appointment of Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister on 16 April as well as the formation of an inclusive Government on 25 April. These are both important steps in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and preconditions for holding free, fair and democratic elections. We are optimistic that these new developments can help pave the way for a lasting resolution to the political crisis in the country.

We commend the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and regional mediation in Guinea-Bissau, which has once again shown how regional efforts can resolve political deadlock and disputes and prevent conflict.

In this context, let me pay particular tribute to the President of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, President Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, and the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Alpha Condé of the Republic of Guinea, for their role.

All stakeholders must now work towards conducting timely and credible elections on 18 November and the further implementation of the Conakry Agreement. Regarding elections, it is essential that the funding gap for voter registration and the organization of the elections be addressed. The ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau will also have an important role in the run-up to the forthcoming elections.

We welcome the reconfiguration of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, José Viegas Filho. We congratulate him on his appointment and look forward to working closely with him.

Despite the recent progress made, real challenges remain that will need to be addressed, and the good-offices function of the Special Representative will be crucial going forward. In addition, we welcome strategic and results-oriented reporting from UNIOGBIS, so that the Security Council can fully play its role by making decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of the situation on the ground and how it can best support the country. This is all the more

important as the situation within the country remains fragile. The current fragility could be exacerbated by the economic situation. We note that this year's cashew harvest seems to be lower than last year's. For that reason, we believe it would be important that a risk assessment and/or conflict analysis be carried out. The Peacebuilding Commission has an important role to play in convening actors and contributing to an analysis of threats and challenges. We welcome the Chair's upcoming visit in July and look forward to him briefing the Council again at the appropriate time. The six-point road map and the Conakry Agreement remain relevant and represent the only legitimate way forward. They must be implemented in full.

Looking forward, in order to target the root causes of the conflict in Guinea-Bissau, it would be important to focus on reconciliation and political dialogue and on strengthening the rule of law through strong and inclusive institutions, which are important drivers of peace. We encourage greater support for the active participation of women in the peace and political processes, especially in the context of the elections. Ensuring women's full involvement in building Guinea-Bissau's future will be an important prerequisite for lasting peace and stability in the country.

Recent months have seen important progress in Guinea-Bissau. The momentum must be seized, and all parties must work together towards the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement and the preparation of inclusive elections. We stand ready to support them and their efforts.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this meeting and appreciates the important briefings of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun; the Ambassador of Brazil, Mr. Mauro Vieira, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission; and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

I would like to start by highlighting the recent progress made in Guinea-Bissau following the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018). Peru welcomes the appointment of Mr. Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister, which was the result of consensus among all parties in accordance with the provisions of the Conakry Agreement. We look forward to the legislative elections scheduled for 18 November, and we note that the National Assembly was able to meet for the first time since 2016. Those developments should allow for progress in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, the fundamental framework for resolving the country's political crisis. In that respect, we would like to refer to three specific aspects that we believe require urgent work in order to achieve sustainable peace in Guinea-Bissau.

The first aspect concerns free and fair elections. We believe that successful legislative elections this year will favour the normal development of the 2019 presidential elections. That implies promoting citizen participation on a large scale, particularly women and young people, in an inclusive and transparent process. We welcome the fact that the National Assembly has appointed the four members of the National Electoral Commission, including its Chair. However, we underline the need to adequately finance the process and have the necessary equipment and logistical capabilities. We therefore support the work that the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) has been doing in terms of mediation, providing good offices and supporting the organization of elections. We welcome the support of the United Nations Development Programme, and we note the need for the international community to continue cooperating.

Secondly, it is necessary to improve security and access to justice. We are especially concerned about the vulnerability of Guinea-Bissau to threats such as drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, which undermine institutions and the social fabric. It is important to prevent terrorist groups in the region from establishing links with those scourges. We therefore consider it important to strengthen institutional capacities, particularly in the area of security and justice, and to promote greater cooperation by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime with UNIOGBIS in order to support national efforts in those areas.

The third point concerns the construction of a prosperous, peaceful and inclusive society. It is necessary to address the root causes of conflict, especially when the majority of the population lives in a situation of poverty and vulnerability. That situation could be aggravated by a decrease in cashew production, the main export. In that regard, we emphasize the need to guarantee predictability and stability in the financing that the Peacebuilding Fund devotes to support the efforts of Guinea-Bissau to allow its population access

to basic education, health and justice services, among others. We encourage that the projects promoted by the Peacebuilding Commission prioritize the sustainable development of the country and that they empower women and youth. We highlight the importance of that work being appropriately coordinated with UNIOGBIS, the United Nations country team and civil society.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the important mediation role played by the Economic Community of West African States, as well as that of the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the European Union, among other international actors committed to peace in Guinea-Bissau. We also recognize the work of Mr. Modibo Touré as Head of UNIOGBIS and welcome the appointment of Mr. José Viegas Filho, the new Special Representative of the Secretary General for Guinea-Bissau and Head of said Office, whose professional qualities are widely recognized.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank Mr. Mauro Vieira, Ambassador of Brazil; Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for their insightful briefings on the political and security situation in Guinea-Bissau. France is very grateful for their respective activities, which occurred alongside the resumption of dialogue between the Guinea-Bissau parties following the October 2016 Conakry Agreement. I would like to touch on three points that have already been highlighted by previous speakers.

First, I wish to reiterate France's full support for the appointment by President José Mario Vaz of Aristides Gomes as consensual Prime Minister. A year and a half after the Conakry Agreement, this appointment attests to the will of the parties to break out of the political impasse. France also welcomes the formation by Prime Minister Gomes of an inclusive Government, whose main undertaking will be to create the political and institutional conditions necessary for the holding of parliamentary elections in November.

Secondly, those recent political developments, which we had hoped for, reflect the coordinated actions of the international community and regional organizations to resolve the Guinea-Bissau crisis. In that respect, I reiterate France's full support for the initiatives of regional organizations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose role has been crucial. It was in the aftermath of the extraordinary session of the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS on Guinea-Bissau that President Vaz appointed Aristides Gomes as Prime Minister. We are convinced that the solution to the conflict will be given pride of place through consultation and engagement with local actors. In that respect, the group of five partners of Guinea-Bissau, mentioned by Ambassador Vieira, constitutes a propitious coordination platform that should be maintained and supported.

Thirdly, it is crucial that the commitment of the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and international donors support the efforts of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), as well as those of UNODC, whose role is essential in creating a healthy environment that is conducive to lasting political stabilization. The recent history of the country calls for subdued optimism in the face of recent progress. It is therefore particularly important that we collectively send the right message, one of vigilance and continued commitment, following the appointment of a consensus Prime Minister.

The new UNIOGBIS mandate in resolution 2404 (2018) should help support the priority areas for the resolution of the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, namely, the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, adherence to the expected time frame for the electoral cycle and carrying out the process of reviewing the Constitution. In that regard, I wish to express our best wishes to the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and express our appreciation for his predecessor.

Finally, the inclusion of women in the crisis-resolution process, specifically through the Network of Women Mediators that has been set up, is also an important element that will promote ongoing dialogue among local parties. To find a lasting solution in Guinea-Bissau, we need an inclusive process supported by all. Failure would be destabilizing, and we cannot permit that.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Tayé-Brook Zerihoun for his briefing on the latest developments in Guinea-Bissau. We are also grateful to Executive Director Fedotov for his remarks via video-teleconference, and we commend the work that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is doing in the fight against

drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. We also appreciate the briefing by the Chair of the configuration for Guinea-Bissau of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), including on the outcome of its latest meeting. We commend the configuration's active and continued engagement in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace in Guinea-Bissau. We note the Chair's intention to visit the country and look forward to hearing his impressions when he returns. We also join others in welcoming the appointment of Mr. José Vegas Filho of Brazil as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), and we thank former Special Representative Modibo Touré for his dedicated service.

As indicated in the briefings we have just heard, there have been positive developments in Guinea-Bissau, and we would like to echo the words of our African colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea. After the institutional paralysis of the past three years, President José Mário Vaz's appointment of Aristide Gomes as a consensus Prime Minister, following consultations with political stakeholders and civil society, is indeed a step in the right direction. The decision regarding the holding of parliamentary elections, the reopening of Parliament and the swearing-in of the new Cabinet are also encouraging. Those and other positive developments have certainly rekindled a sense of hope and optimism, and we very much welcome them. We would like to congratulate the Government of Guinea-Bissau and the political actors for their constructive engagement, which has led to this breakthrough.

The role played by the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) in resolving the institutional paralysis is indeed commendable, and it is testament to the significant contribution that regional and subregional organizations can make in resolving conflict and crisis situations in their immediate neighbourhood, in close coordination with other international stakeholders. Of course, we cannot lose sight of the challenges that remain, and we hope that the positive momentum we are seeing will be maintained.

The centrality of the Conakry Agreement to sustaining peace, security and development in Guinea-Bissau cannot be overemphasized, and we hope all stakeholders in the country will respect and comply with the Agreement in addressing their differences and the challenges facing their country. The sustained engagement of the international community will unquestionably be vital to creating an environment conducive to holding peaceful and credible elections, as well as filling in the country's financial gaps. The continued support of UNIOGBIS and the PBC configuration will also be very important in that regard.

Finally, we believe that concerted efforts on the part of ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and other relevant partners will continue to be essential to realizing a lasting solution in Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to sincerely thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Mr. Mauro Vieira, Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their valuable briefings.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau, Mr. José Vegas Filho, on assuming his new position. We wish him success in that role and assure him of our full support. I should also like to thank the outgoing Special Representative, Mr. Modibo Touré, for his achievements. We wish him every success in his future endeavours.

A year and a half has passed since the signing of the Conakry Agreement, and we are pleased to see practical, positive steps being taken by all parties towards establishing an environment conducive to the implementation of the remaining provisions of the Agreement. In that regard, we welcome the decision by President José Mário Vaz to select a consensus Prime Minister, form an inclusive Government and set November as the date for legislative elections. We urge all the parties concerned to continue with that constructive approach and pursue implementation of the outstanding provisions of the Agreement.

With regard to the parliamentary elections, we urge the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau to provide the necessary support for holding the elections pursuant to its mandate under resolution 2404 (2018), ensure that all sectors of society participate in the election process and monitor the situation closely to prevent any incidents that could undermine the process. We welcome the continued

efforts by the Peacebuilding Commission to mobilize funding in support of the election process, which now amounts to $7.7 million.

It would be remiss of me not to commend the efforts of regional and international organizations working in Guinea-Bissau to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries have made great efforts with all stakeholders to implement a number of the provisions in the Agreement, especially in the light of regional conflict-resolution initiatives.

We welcome the efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission to support the roles of women and civil society. We also commend UNODC's role in fighting drug-trafficking and organized crime.

The recent positive developments in Guinea-Bissau have been made possible by the work done by regional organizations to enhance progress on the ground. That requires the Security Council's support. We call on ECOWAS to continue its efforts in this area. We are now looking forward to seeing the national conference on constitutional reform provided for in the Conakry Agreement held at the end of the year.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands would like to express sincere thanks to Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, Mr. Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission configuration, Ambassador Vieira, for their briefings on the situation in Guinea-Bissau.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Special Representative Touré for his hard work in Guinea-Bissau and warmly welcome the incoming Special Representative, Mr. Filho, to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) team. We also commend the important work of UNODC on the ground, particularly in the light of the new mandate stipulated in resolution 2404 (2018), and we look forward to working closely with UNIOGBIS as the situation in Guinea-Bissau continues to improve.

Regarding the situation in Guinea-Bissau and the implementation of resolution 2404 (2018), I would like to focus on three aspects: the positive developments on the ground in Guinea-Bissau; the importance of supporting regional efforts, particularly by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and the importance of the continued engagement of the Security Council.

First, we would like once again to welcome the developments on the ground in Guinea-Bissau. The appointment of a consensus Prime Minister, the formation of an inclusive Government and the setting of a concrete date for legislative elections are positive steps. Those steps show the goodwill of the key political actors in Guinea-Bissau and create space for UNIOGBIS to work on its mandate, with a Government and Parliament that are functioning.

We would like to highlight the critical role played by women's organizations in breaking the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau, and to reiterate that their full and equal participation in Guinea-Bissau is key. We encourage the Guinea-Bissau Government to continue to engage with women in all steps and at all levels of the political process.

It is important that the Government, the President and the other political actors continue to work towards organizing free and fair legislative elections on 18 November and presidential elections next year. Moving forward, it is essential to restore faith in democratic institutions and work towards national reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau.

That brings me to my second point, namely, support for the region. Five key political organizations — UNIOGBIS, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the European Union, the African Union and particularly ECOWAS, also known as the P-5 — play an important role in Guinea-Bissau. It is important that the Security Council continue to support the active engagement of ECOWAS and the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau, as well as the strong collaboration among ECOWAS, UNIOGBIS and the rest of the P-5 in moving forward. We cannot underestimate the role that ECOWAS played in breaking through the political impasse. It will be vital that the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General continue to support ECOWAS and to stimulate that collaboration in the coming months, particularly in the light of the organization of the elections.

I come to my third point. There is no room for complacency on the issue of Guinea-Bissau. The Security Council must remain engaged. While the

recent developments in Guinea-Bissau are positive, we must not lose sight of the importance of the full implementation of the Bissau six-point road map and the Conakry Agreement. While welcoming the positive developments, we must also shed light, when necessary, on the issues that concern us, such as the appointment of the new Minister of State Botché Candé by President Vaz. Botché Candé is on the ECOWAS sanctions list, and his appointment serves as a reminder that, while the political situation has improved, the situation in Guinea-Bissau is still fragile.

Those political improvements may be short-lived if the underlying structural issues are not addressed. The new Government is tasked with building a Government programme that supports national unity. It is key that the stakeholders of Guinea-Bissau be able to move past the political impasse.

In conclusion, we urge the political actors and the P-5 on the ground to continue to work towards supporting the inclusive Government in Guinea-Bissau, the organization of free and fair presidential elections and the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement and the Bissau six-point road map. The continued engagement of the Security Council will remain essential in moving forward.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Mr. Fedotov and Ambassador Vieira for their briefings.

China commends the recent progress in the political process in Guinea-Bissau and the start of the implementation of the Conakry Agreement by the various parties in the country. Regional and subregional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), played an important role in mediation and good offices in resolving the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau, which China appreciates. China calls on international donors and partners to provide bilateral and multilateral cooperation so as to continue to support the country in its efforts to strengthen State capacity and to improve the lives of its people.

We hope that the United Nations country team, the Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will provide targeted assistance to the country, given its needs.

China supports African countries in providing African solutions to African problems. They should work alongside the international community, including ECOWAS, together with UNIOGBIS and the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Filho, in order to promote dialogue and communication among the various stakeholders in Guinea-Bissua, to preserve stability and lasting development in Guinea-Bissau and West Africa and to play a constructive role in that regard.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, Mr. Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Ambassador Vieira for their insightful briefings on the latest developments in Guinea-Bissau.

Kazakhstan welcomes the recent encouraging steps by all parties to end the protracted political stalemate in Guinea-Bissau. It is heartening to note the appointment of Prime Minister Gomes by consensus, the formation of an inclusive Government and the agreement to hold legislative elections on 18 November.

We would like to congratulate the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. José Viegas Filho, on his appointment, and we wish him every success. We extend our full support for his commitment to facilitating a political solution to the crisis. We join others in expressing our deep appreciation to the former Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), Mr. Modibo Touré, for his dedicated service.

We also commend the mediation efforts undertaken by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under the leadership of Presidents Faure Gnassingbé of Togo and Alpha Condé of Guinea. We acknowledge the efforts of the members of the Guinea-Bissau group of five international organizations. We believe that all of those measures have significantly contributed to the recent positive developments and are steps in the right direction. We welcome the decision to extend the mandate of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau until 30 June, given that the Mission plays a crucial role in contributing to stability in Guinea-Bissau. We therefore hope for the further extension of the Mission's mandate.

Expeditious preparations for the elections are now necessary. It is clear that international partners must come together to provide the necessary technical, logistical and financial support for the electoral process.

Using that constructive momentum, we call on all parties to promptly take the necessary steps to implement the other outstanding provisions of the Conakry Agreement, including the constitutional review and the adoption of a stability pact. Other matters of concern that must be given urgent attention by all of us are drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. National engagement is critical to implementing the various international programmes and projects aimed at strengthening the security, judicial and law enforcement sectors. We therefore support the technical assistance package for Guinea-Bissau developed by UNODC. We call on the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to continue to strengthen cooperation with UNIOGBIS, UNODC and INTERPOL in those areas.

In addition to such steps, the most effective measures must be sought to ensure the country's stability and resilience by increased support for the existing development plans and the United Nations peacebuilding strategy, with a special focus on education and health care. Ensuring the participation of women and youth in the political process at every stage and at all levels is equally important. We call on all donors to provide the necessary funds for implementing all such measures.

We welcome the plans of Ambassador Mauro Vieira and of Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba, as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012), concerning Guinea-Bissau, to visit the country. That will further contribute to improved dialogue among the parties. We reaffirm our readiness to work closely with all the relevant parties to support peacebuilding and consolidation efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the information provided by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Yury Fedotov, and Ambassador Mauro Vieira in his capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

It is almost three years since the beginning of the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, which had to do with the adverse political context. Today we have great expectations as we see the country's difficulties being overcome, thanks to the appointment of a consensus Prime Minister through a compromise deal that has revitalized the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, which remains the basic framework for a peaceful settlement of the crisis and the quest for lasting and sustainable peace. We are also closely watching the development and adoption of a Government programme that will help to establish the Government's parameters and structure.

We once again call for consolidating those accords, which will enable all stakeholders to continue to advance the implementation of a lasting political and social settlement based solely on the best interests of the people of Guinea-Bissau in strict respect for their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. In that regard, we believe that within the framework of the road map of 10 September 2016, inclusive dialogue must continue to be one of the main tools for enabling the holding of elections to the legislature during the current Administration and presidential elections in 2019.

Despite the far-reaching implications of the political progress that has been made, Guinea-Bissau is facing various challenges that must be dealt with as effectively as possible. First, in the short term, both the Government and the Parliament are in need of technical and financial support so that they can begin registering voters and consolidating the mechanisms needed for holding the parliamentary elections. Cooperation among the relevant regional and subregional organizations is essential to that, and we therefore acknowledge the major efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Mission in Guinea-Bissau, as well as the contributions of the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, and the important work of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) aimed at bringing together the parties to the conflict and encouraging dialogue.

We welcome the efforts and outstanding work of former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Modibo Touré, whom we wish every success in his future assignments. We also welcome the appointment of the new Special Representative and Head of UNIOGBIS, Mr. José Viegas Filho, who we are confident will perform his duties with the utmost professionalism. We believe that the work of UNIOGBIS must be strengthened and focused on initiatives that will continue to provide opportunities

for dialogue. We are sure that such factors will help to form an inclusive Government and consolidate the upcoming electoral processes.

With regard to the work of UNIOGBIS, we are eagerly awaiting the strategic review of the mission and its proposed reconfiguration. We also commend the work of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, ably chaired by Brazil, and we emphasize the importance of strengthening links related to cooperation and information-sharing between the mission and the Security Council. We also encourage the initiative of the Women's Leadership Forum on Peace. In Guinea-Bissau, the work that women are doing in the quest for a political solution shows how essential a gender perspective and female participation in mediation and dialogue are.

With regard to the stabilization of the country and security matters, combating drug trafficking and transnational crime must continue to be a priority. The role of the United Nations through the country team and the United Nations Development Programme must be an integral part of fostering development and reinforcing the rule of law, with the goal of decreasing exposure to drugs and crime by strengthening the various components of the justice system. The international community must also provide Guinea-Bissau with the assistance needed to improve its control of its coasts and airspace and to train the police to investigate organized crime and drug-trafficking activities.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the progress that has been made so far through synergies between all the parties. We reiterate once again that in times of political, institutional and social crisis, ensuring the well-being of the population, especially the most vulnerable sectors, must be the overriding interest guiding our efforts to achieve definitive stabilization in Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tayé-Brook Zerihoun; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Mr. Mauro Vieira, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their informative briefings. We also welcome the appointment of Mr. José Viegas Filho as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Guinea-Bissau and wish him success in his work.

We note the significant progress that has been made in resolving the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau since the appointment of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes by President José Mário Vaz in early April. We welcome the formation of a consensus Government, whose members, we understand, are acceptable to all the main political forces in Guinea-Bissau. We support the work of the country's leadership in preparing for the parliamentary elections scheduled for November. We expect the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) to provide effective support for the electoral processes, in line with its mandate established pursuant to resolution 2404 (2018). We have taken note of the plans to convene a national assembly on issues related to a review of the Constitution in the near future. We believe that will be extremely important from the point of view of formulating proposals for reforming the country's founding laws and avoid any future repetition of the current political turbulence. We note with satisfaction UNIOGBIS's efforts supporting the authorities in preparing the assembly.

We would like to draw special attention to the importance of combating transnational crime and drug trafficking in the region. The efforts that Mr. Fedotov spoke about deserve our full support.

We would like to thank the Economic Community of West African States for promoting a political settlement of the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau. At the same time, we believe that any agreements concerning the country's future and its arrangements should be based on the aspirations of its citizens themselves, without any pressure or the imposition of ready-made solutions from the outside. Responding to truly national interests is the only way that they can play a positive role in the country's ability to emerge from a prolonged crisis.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Poland.

I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Tayé-Brook Zerihoun and Ambassador Mauro Vieira, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, for their very informative briefings on the recent developments in Guinea-Bissau. I would also like to thank Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, for his comprehensive analysis.

Poland welcomes the recent positive developments in Guinea-Bissau following the Summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held in Lomé on 14 April. The appointment of an inclusive Government, headed by consensus Prime Minister, Mr. Aristides Gomes, the reopening of the National Assembly, the election of the President of the National Electoral Commission and the announcement of parliamentary elections to be held in November constitute major steps to ending the political impasse and successfully implementing the Conakry Agreement.

Against that backdrop, drug trafficking and organized crime continue to represent grave threats to peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau. In that regard, we call on the political leaders and State institutions to combat those crimes in cooperation with UNODC, ECOWAS and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

Finally, we commend the role played by the President of the ECOWAS Authority, President Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, and the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, President Alpha Condé of the Republic of Guinea, as well as other regional and international facilitators in resolving the political crisis. Last but not least, let me express our full support to the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. José Viegas Filho. Let me also express our sincere gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Modibo Touré, for his efforts aimed at resolving the political crisis in Guinea-Bissau.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Da Silva (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me to the Security Council and for giving me the floor.

Eighteen months after the signing of the Conakry Agreement, my country finally has a consensual Prime Minister. Since 25 April, Guinea-Bissau now has an inclusive Government. I have the great pleasure of thanking all of the Council members for their patience, efforts and solidarity. I would like to express my gratitude to the Security Council, the Economic Community of West African States and Ambassador Mauro Vieira.

Our inclusive Government has the great challenge of preparing the upcoming legislative elections, scheduled for 18 November. The Conakry Agreement also requires that a number of institutional reforms be carried out. Why? It is not enough to just conduct successful elections to automatically consolidate the institutional stability of our democratic rule of law.

To give Council members a more accurate picture of our lengthy institutional crisis, I wish to recall here that over the past 24 years of our pluralistic democracy, Guinea-Bissau has had five legislative elections, suffered a civil war and was shaken by two coups d'état. The current Prime Minister, Aristides Gomes, is the twentieth person to occupy that post. All that clearly demonstrates that it is not enough to hold successful elections to consolidate democratic institutions. To achieve all the goals enshrined in the Conakry Agreement, the inclusive Government and Parliament will need the participation of the international community — for example, in the area of technical assistance.

Guinea-Bissau needs the support of the Council to conduct universal, participatory, transparent, free and fair elections. In spite of our domestic financial efforts, which have, and will continue, to come from the State budget, the Government will need financial assistance to cover the inherent costs, including sound technical preparation of the elections. In that regard, I would point to the urgency of updating the voter registration rules, especially regarding the registration of new voters, namely, the thousands of young people who have reached voting age since the last elections, in 2014.

In the new political framework, we will continue to count on the patience and solidarity of the members of the Council. Most important for us is that fact that now we can build up our central public institutions and, finally, move towards a recovered constitutional order through the re-established political dialogue.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish every success to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in my country, Mr. José Viegas Filho. The appointment of a Brazilian national to that post is a renewed source of hope for us. In conclusion, I can assure those present that they have our gratitude.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.